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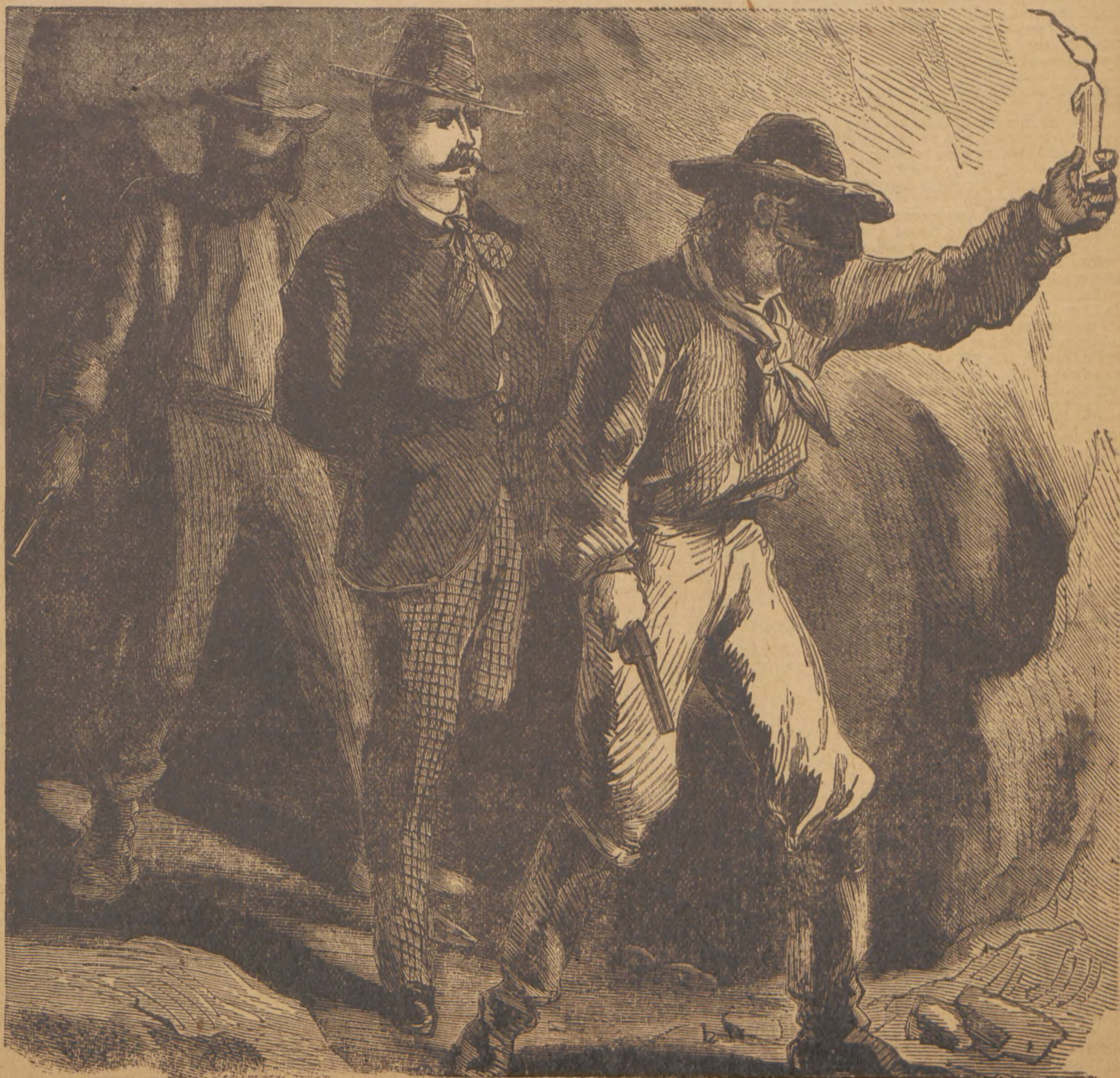
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POKER JACK, THE DETECTIVE SPORT.



"AWAY WITH HIM TO THE DEVIL'S STEW-KETTLE."

Poker Jack, the Detective Sport;

OR,

The Protege of Pilgrims' Bar

A Romance of Silent Saul, the Young Mountain Patrol.

BY OLL COOMES.

CHAPTER I.

EXCITEMENT IN PILGRIMS' BAR.

PILGRIMS' BAR was thrilled to its center.

A young girl had ridden into the place that day and asked for protection.

Had the Angel Gabriel appeared to announce the end of time, the citizens could not have been more surprised, for she was the first woman to set foot in Pilgrims' Bar—the first that many of the miners had seen in years; and her coming there alone, the angelic beauty of her face, the girlish simplicity of her bearing, all conspired to fill their excited minds with the belief that she was a divine visitant, notwithstanding the emphatic assertion of Old Mahomet, an odd and eccentric character of the camp, that the Lord would not permit an angel to appear among such wicked men.

They soon discovered, however, that she was a creature of flesh and blood, then their wonder became confusion dire.

Years of seclusion from female society—of the roughest life and associations, had almost deprived them of their mother tongue, and now, when unexpectedly called upon by the gentle little lady, they stood, almost dumb, for the lack of words to address her.

Joshua Bloom, the mayor of the camp, a stalwart and bearded man of forty years, was, by virtue of his official standing, delegated to meet the girl; so, brushing back his long hair, and, doffing his slouched hat, as the beautiful stranger drew rein before him, he said:

"Hullo! how do ye do, miss? Ben't you lost?"

In a low voice, her white lips tremulous with fear, she replied:

"Oh, stranger! I know not where I am, but, I pray God I may have found a camp where I can have protection from my enemies!"

"You can bet your dust every man in the gulch would die for you, miss," replied the mayor.

"Thank you!" the girl answered, a little confused by the man's compliment, that look of fear and uncertainty vanishing from her eyes, and that tremor from her voice.

"I reckon," the official observed, "as what you've struck the wrong lead, eh?"

"Sir? I did not understand?"

"I presume your lost?"

"No, sir," the girl replied; "I cannot say now that I am; but oh! I am so tired and distressed, that I cannot tell you why I am here at present, if you will please excuse me!"

"To be sure I will!" exclaimed Bloom, "Just fly down here, and I'll take ye to the best shebang in camp where ye shall have food and rest, or my name ar'n't Josh Bloom."

The mayor assisted the girl to dismount, and having called a miner to take care of the horse, he conducted her to his own cabin, which she was informed would be her own as long as she was a guest of Pilgrims' Bar.

After she had been refreshed, and made as comfortable as possible, the mayor left her and hastened to the "City Hall."

Pilgrims' Bar was a placer camp in the "Gold Belt" of Southwestern Utah. It was located in a deep gulch in a spur of the Sierra Madre Mountains, and on the banks of a little stream that went gliding down over golden sands to mingle with the waters of the Virgin River. It was somewhat remote from other camps, and some fifty miles from the nearest Mormon settlement. But despite its seclusion, and the smallness of its population, it affected the airs of more pretentious camps.

There were not over two-score men in the camp.

The "City Hall" was headquarters. It was kept by a man called "Swanzy." It was a general supply store for the camp—it was a saloon and gambling-place as well.

Alongside the "City Hall" was the "Soup Shop." This was a boarding-house kept by two negroes bearing the euphonious names of "Alligator" Sam and "Catfish" Joe.

As Mayor Bloom approached the City Hall, after leaving the girl, he was met by a man whose face was all aglow with smiles. He was perhaps five-and-fifty years of age, of medium height and build. His face was covered with a

short, stubby beard, and his head with thin locks of grizzly gray hair. He had a pair of steel-gray eyes, in one of which there was a squint. His mouth was slightly askew and its corners stained with the juice of tobacco. He was dressed in a miner's suit with the exception of his hat, which was a broken and battered gray "plug," hanging carelessly on the back of his head.

This individual was known as Old Mahomet, the Puzzle, the Bum, the Pilgrim, and divers other nicknames. He was the genius of the camp. He was odd, eccentric and jolly. He had a great aversion to physical labor, but loved to stroll alone in the hills, usually preferring the shadows of night to the light of day. He was an inveterate gambler, and was never known to refuse a drink of whisky.

Until he came to Pilgrims' Bar, nine months previous, not a soul had ever heard of or seen Old Mahomet. The history he gave of himself was accepted as true, due allowances being made for reckless self-contradictions, and his perversion of facts and figures to suit his story. Because of his jolly, genial spirit, his whims and eccentricities, he was accepted into full fellowship by the miners, who soon discovered that he was a deep, shrewd man.

"Wal, May'r Bloom," the old man said, as the two met, "my predictions have gone wrong won't, and an angel has swooped down upon us and found the camp in dirt and sin."

"Set a good 'zample, Mahomet, by goin' forthwith and takin' a bath," responded Bloom, facetiously.

"I war moved by inspiration to take a dip in a mountain pool yisterday, may'r," Mahomet replied; "but say, Bloom, did ye find out who that gal is, and whar she come from?"

"She was so tired and flighty-like that I didn't stop to ax any questions. When she's rested I'll interview her."

"Say, may'r," observed Old Mahomet, "wouldn't I make a fine com'ity to call on the angel and talk 'ith her? You never heard me warble to a woman, did ye? Oh! I'm a brunette on rockers when it comes to that! I used to be a hull jewel-shop 'mongst the ladies, but I'd got a little rusty the past few years; but since she come, my old memory's been fillin' up like a guide to courtship on fine words an' sayin's."

"Then I'll take ye 'long when I go to interview her," decided Bloom; "but I've a proclamation to issue fu'st. Come into the hall."

The two entered the building, a long, roomy log structure, in which most of the camp had assembled to discuss the great sensation of the hour. Mayor Bloom mounted an empty whisky barrel, and in a sharp, business tone shouted:

"Men o' Pilgrims' Bar, you'll please close the gaps in yer faces and come to order."

A deep and respectful silence followed.

"Friends and citizens," the mayor went on, "we have somethin' to do. As you all know, one o' the Lord's purest and prettiest of angels has come amongst us askin' our protection from—I know not what. I feel that her comin' is an omen o' good-luck to us; but, be it good or bad, it is our duty to protect her till purgatory is a solid cake o' crystal ice. And furthermore, we don't want her to think that she's in the lair o' a gang o' wild animals, or a band of water prohibitionists; therefore, by virtue of the power vested in me as mayor o' this camp, I do hereby issue the follerin' verbal proclamation—to wit, namely: 'Every man shall perceed at once and forthwith to wash hisself, dress up his beard, comb his ha'r, sand-stone the tobacco-drip off'n his shirt-front, take his pants outen his boot-tops, see that both suspenders are in workin' order—if he wears such things at all—and remove the mournin' from his hands and nails that some o' ye brought here from Arizony, nine months ago. If any rooster o' you appears before the Protege o' Pilgrims' Bar without havin' fu'st complied with the orders hereunto set forth in this proclamation, he shall be subject to a heavy fine, or forever furbidden to speak to the gal, or both, and be drummed out o' camp to boot. Do ye hear, men o' Pilgrims' Bar?"

An affirmative shout almost raised the roof on the "City Hall."

"Then git thar!" commanded the official, "and in two hours report here for inspection."

An amusing activity followed the mayor's orders. The miners proceeded *en masse* to the creek and made a most thorough ablution. In the absence of soap, the free use of sandy clay answered the purpose admirably.

Gator Sam, one of the boarding-house darkies, the possessor of the only razor in the camp, and which he had always carried as a weapon of defense, with an eye to business, at

once announced that he would do shaving and hair-dressing at a quarter ounce of dust "per rooster," and during the entire two hours he drove a thriving business, assisted by his partner, Catfish Joe.

Finally, when the miners had made their toilet, so to speak, all were "rouned up" in the saloon for inspection, by the mayor, who had, himself, trimmed his beard, combed his hair and put on a clean shirt.

A roar of laughter burst from Bloom's lips as he gazed upon the metamorphosed faces around him. Every man had done his best, and some so well that they were almost entire strangers to him. The latter were those who had been shaved clean, and had their hair cut, and in more than one case the change was so complete that the mayor facetiously begged an introduction.

Old Mahomet came up smiling with his thin locks combed smooth, the tobacco-stains removed from his broad bearded chin, his clothes well "sand-scoured," and his hat raised to its full height, padded out, and sitting squarely on his head.

"A real, good-lookin' set o' kiyotes," the mayor declared, approvingly, "and while this 'ere little affair has made some o' ye strangers to each other, and removed all di-doubts as to your belonging to the Caucasian race, I hope it's the beginnin' o' a new era in the history Pilgrims' Bar."

"Men, for twenty years I've been a miner, and my heart had grown calloused. All the gentler incidents o' my earlier life war blotted from my mem'ry, so it seemed; but the instant that gal's little warm hand touched mine it sent a thrill through my whole being, and instantly the past loomed up before me. I caught the glimpse of a dear old face—the face o' my mother long in her grave—of a kind, gentle sister, now—God only knows where! Ever since, pleasant things and dear faces have been passin' before me—things and faces o' my younger days, and I begin to feel like another man—a better man. And now, men!" and the stalwart mayor pitched his voice in a higher key, at the same time brandishing a revolver above his head, "I want you to remember that the fu'st son of a mother o' ye that offers that gal an insult, by deed or thought, I will shoot—"

He did not finish the sentence, for at this moment the clatter of horses' hoofs sweeping down the street, mingled with a wild, piercing scream—the scream of a woman—assailed the ears of the miners, and sent a sickening chill to their very hearts!

CHAPTER II.

SILENT SAUL.

FOR a moment the miners stood staring from one to the other as if their bodies had been paralyzed; but it was for a moment only. With a bound like that of a deer, Old Mahomet rushed from the saloon. He was closely followed by Bloom, who in turn was followed by all the miners.

"My Lord!" cried Old Mahomet, "a devil has got our angel!"

A horseman was flying down the gulch, and in his arms he held the struggling form of the Protege of Pilgrims' Bar. With the exception of the hat on his head he was dressed as an Indian.

"Halt! halt!" shouted Bloom at the top of his lungs, as he rushed down the road; but the villain was already beyond pistol-range, and, cognizant of the fact, he glanced back over his shoulder at the excited miners, and uttered a fierce, defiant yell. But it was his last, for it blended with the sharp report of a rifle, and he leaped almost out of his saddle. His horse came to a sudden stop, the girl slipped from his arms and fell motionless to the ground, while he, swaying to and fro for a moment or two, finally pitched forward and dropped heavily to the earth.

"Gods! but wasn't that a juicy shot?" exclaimed Mahomet, as he and Bloom hastened to the assistance of the maiden.

"But I'm afraid it's killed the gal, too," replied the mayor.

"Better she be dead'n in that devil's clutches!" declared Old Mahomet; "but, who fired the shot?"

"There comes the man," responded Bloom, pointing to a figure that had emerged from the bushes at the side of the gulch and was advancing, rifle in hand.

"By the royal Jacobins! it's Silent Saul, the Young Mountain Patrol," declared the old miner.

And so it was. With hasty footsteps the young mountaineer approached them, a look of deep anxiety upon his face—an eager light

burning in his eyes. And such a face! and such eyes!

Scarcely more than twenty years of age could this new-comer have been. He was above the medium in height, broad-shouldered, deep-chested, with muscular limbs and small extremities, the ideal of physical manhood. But, still more remarkable was his face, which was devoid of beard, slightly oval in contour, with a high and noble forehead, a fairly prominent nose, and a mouth expressive of firmness and decision. His eyes were of a dark blue, keen and bright, but nervous and sweeping in their glances—the eyes of one accustomed to eternal vigilance—not the vigilance of the hunted fugitive—but like that of the noble buck that instinctively suspects the presence of danger at all times, whether wandering in the grassy vale or traversing the gloomy wind-carving of the mountains.

Still another striking feature of this youth was his hair. It was of a light golden hue such as is seldom seen except upon the heads of children. It was tossed back from brow and temple, and fell like yellow, silken floss to his shoulders, giving a softening effect to the peculiarly rugged yet handsome face, every lineament of which seemed to have been the development of a single life-purpose combining manly courage, fearless determination and heroic patience.

He was dressed as a mountaineer, his trowsers, over-shirt and moccasins being of buckskin. A light, blue flannel undershirt lay open at the collar, revealing a smooth yet strong neck, across which ran, just above the Adam's apple, a horrible red scar.

He was armed with a handsome repeating-rifle, a knife and revolver. Around his waist was a belt filled with fixed ammunition, for both rifle and revolver.

Thus appeared Silent Saul, the Young Mountain Patrol, as he was known to Pilgrims' Bar, as the other camps of the "Silver Belt," and the Mormon settlements further north. Beyond his name, little was really known of him more than that he was speechless—dumb—a misfortune that must have been the result of accident, for his hearing was as acute as that of the mountain deer.

As no one could obtain from him a single word regarding the cause of his loss of speech, or of his history, many were the conjectures in regard to him. Some believed he was simply a hunter, whose striking appearance and voiceless lips had surrounded him with an air of mystery. Some regarded him as an avenging Nemesis, whose incentive lay in the silence of his tongue and the red scar across his throat; while others suspected him of being a spy and scout of the Danites, or of the outlaws under the leadership of the daring, dashing bandit, Revenue Bill.

But, as no proof of his having been, in any way, connected with evil-doers, was ever brought against him, and as he always conducted himself with a manly dignity and honor in keeping with his frank, open countenance, he was kindly received and entertained in all the mining-camps that he occasionally visited.

Knowing that Silent Saul had slain the maiden's would-be abductor, and observing the inquiring look upon his face that his silent tongue could not put into words as he came up, Old Mahomet, who had discovered that the girl had not been hit by his bullet, exclaimed:

"Well done, Saul! The gal's only scared and slightly stunned by her fall! Come forward and receive the eternal thanks o' Pilgrims' Bar, you yaller-haired glory—you magnificent whooper!"

A faint smile lighted up the face of the Young Mountain Patrol, and with a wave of the hand and bow of the head he acknowledged Mahomet's compliment.

Assisted by Mayor Bloom the maiden arose to her feet, gazing in confusion and affright about her. Her eyes met those of Silent Saul for the first time, and as a light of admiration shone from their depths, and a tinge of red suffused her face, she said:

"You are the gentleman who so kindly rescued me?"

Silent Saul touched his hat and answered with a nod of the head.

"Miss Idyl," remarked Old Mahomet, "Silent Saul is dumb;—he cannot speak."

An expression of pain flitted over the maiden's lovely face. She saw Saul take a small tablet from his pocket and begin to write thereon. When he had finished he handed the tablet to her.

Bloom and Mahomet examined the face of the fallen foe, who lay a few feet away.

"An' Ingin, by jumpin' Jacobins!" exclaimed

Mahomet, "and the yaller-maned boy give him the miasma squar' atwixt the peepers. But, may'r, who'd 'a' thought Injuns war 'bout these diggin's? The lopin' varlet has follered the gal here, and, while we war toiletin' ourselves up and takin' lessons in ettikette, the sly devil stole into camp and got the gal right under our proboscises; and if it hadn't been for Yaller-Top she'd been lost, soul and body."

"Well, there's one thing certain," Bloom answered, "and that is—we may look out for further troubles from the red-skins. There's more than this one 'round in these hills, and they'll not give—Ah! horsemen are coming now!"

The clatter of hoofs fell upon their ears.

The next moment two masked men galloped into view around a point of rocks that were thrust sharply out into the valley, and with revolvers in their right hands opened fire on the miners at a distance of twenty rods.

"Mormon avengers! or outlaws!" yelled Mahomet, "and they're after the gal or blood! Boys, let's warm 'em up with lead—fill 'em full!"

But, he had scarcely finished speaking before Silent Saul had stepped from the crowd around him, throw his rifle to his shoulder, and fired.

One of the masked horsemen was seen to throw up his arms the instant the rifle cracked; his revolver fell from his hand, he reeled in his saddle and would have fallen had his companion not caught him about the waist, dragged him from his saddle to a position across his horse's withers, then turned and beat an inglorious retreat to shelter behind the point of rocks, as rapidly as he had come.

Silent Saul was greeted by a ringing shout from the miners, as he coolly turned and walked back to where they stood. But, when the excitement had abated, and it was discovered that two of the crowd had been wounded by the bullets of the masked horsemen, the miners' joy turned to the wildest indignation.

The maiden was immediately escorted back to Bloom's cabin, and, to make sure that another surprise might not occur, two men armed with rifles were placed on guard outside the door.

Another meeting was held at the City Hall and the state of affairs discussed. That the two masked horsemen were whites, and confederates of the wily red-skin, there seemed little doubt; but, whether all three were outlaws, or merely the tools of Mormonism, they knew not. The facts, however, they concluded, could be ascertained from the maiden, for it was from those very men she had doubtless sought the protection of the camp.

A visit to the girl was finally decided upon, and Mayor Bloom and the voluble Mahomet selected as the party to hold the interview. But, much to the surprise of all, when Bloom was ready to start on his mission, Mahomet was found missing, nor could he be found anywhere, high or low, in the camp!

What did it mean? It was easy to ask the question, but no one could answer it. Some thought it a little singular that he should leave them as he did at that critical time, but the more outspoken declared that it looked decidedly suspicious.

CHAPTER III.

THE LONE NIGHT SCOUT.

THE disappearance of Mahomet caused no little excitement in camp, and delayed the interview with the maiden. Some thought he would soon return and account for his absence. It was nothing unusual for him to wander off alone day or night; but it was leaving at that particular time, when all was excitement, that disturbed them.

Silent Saul finally announced that he would go out in search of the absent man, and at the same time reconnoiter the surrounding hills and woods. He seemed to suspect the presence of enemies in force somewhere about.

Taking his departure, he proceeded down the gulch to the Virgin River, a mile from camp, up which stream he turned his footsteps.

Briskly he walked along, his form erect, his keen eyes taking in everything around him, his golden hair, as he turned his head, seeming to emit flashes of mellow sunlight.

Silent as his voice were his footsteps, and so sprightly that he soon found himself three or four miles from camp.

By this time the sun had gone and the day was near its end.

Darkness found the Young Patrol near a great whirlpool in the river known thereabouts as the "Devil's Stew-Kettle." It was at a point where the river made a sharp bend. The water, after sweeping with great velocity

down a rocky inclination, shot over a fall of six or eight feet high into a great stone-walled basin with a sullen roar.

At that season of the year the volume of water in the Virgin River was reduced to a minimum, yet the pool was none the less noisy—boiling, swirling, bubbling and gurgling as though it held in its embrace a dozen writhing, strangling demons.

For a moment Silent Saul stood and gazed into the angry flood, and listened to the medley of the strange sounds.

Finally he turned to depart. As he did so, he started, stopped and glanced over his shoulder. He heard a peculiar sound—a choking cough. It seemed to come from the depths of the whirlpool; but upon reflection the Young Patrol conceived how easy it was, with a slight stretch of the imagination, to hear any sound of distress and turmoil in the angry waters, and so dismissing the matter from his mind, he went on his way.

The course the young mountaineer took lay through a body of heavy timbers, and as night had now set in, the darkness was intense. However, the youth moved on, slowly, cautiously, until his ears were assailed by a faint sound, when he stopped and listened.

The sound was repeated, and it seemed to be a human groan, and looking in the direction whence it proceeded, he discerned the faint glow of a light.

Concealing his rifle and cartridge-belt, he crept cautiously toward the light, revolver in hand. He soon came in full view of three or four camp-fires, around which were seated, standing and reclining, no less than two-score men.

Creeping still closer—so close that he could hear the men talk, he was enabled to make out the complexion of the party, or some of it, at any rate.

It was an easy matter to distinguish the presence of half-a-dozen red-skins who were dressed in full Indian garbs, except that they wore hats. Besides these, and a few Mexicans, all the others were white men, so to speak. Few of them were dressed alike. The garb of the miner, the ranchero, the mountaineer, the bandit and the Mormon "disciple" was represented in the crowd. Having ascertained this much, the next thing to determine was the character of the party.

All were heavily armed.

A wounded man lay upon the ground near one of the fires, ever and anon breaking forth into groans of pain.

One of the most conspicuous of the party Silent Saul finally recognized as one "Bishop" Darral, a prominent Mormon residing some forty or fifty miles to the northward. He was not, in reality, a "bishop," but was so-called, for he was a bright and shining light of the Church, hated by the Gentiles, and feared by his friends.

He was past fifty years of age, with a tall, muscular form, a bearded face, and cold, cruel gray eyes, around which were gathered the deep, hard lines so characteristic of a passionate and violent temper.

Another person of note whom Silent Saul recognized was none other than the bandit chief, Revenue Bill. That he and "Bishop" Darral should affiliate was not at all surprising to many Gentiles, for the opinion had long prevailed that Revenue Bill was an agent of the Mormon Church, and that the "collections" he took up among the Gentiles were for the benefit of that institution.

But be that as it may, Revenue Bill's mode of robbery was different, somewhat, from that of most outlaws. He would descend upon the outlying camps when least expected—and it seemed he had agents at every camp to notify him of the most favorable time to call—take the miners off their guard, make a demand for a certain amount of wealth—never in excess of the amount on hand—and on obtaining it quietly depart for new fields.

Naturally enough, the miners became enraged, and prepared to give the dashing bandit a warm reception the next time he came. But, Bill was shrewd enough never to call at the same place the second time, for as new mines were being almost daily opened up, his source of revenue was unlimited, even though he made but one "assessment" on a place.

The wounded man in camp Saul felt confident was one of the masked horsemen he had shot that evening near Pilgrims' Bar, and if so, he realized that a great danger hung over the camp.

It might have been merely accident that threw "Bishop" Darral and his friends into the

camp with the outlaws that night; but, whether this was so or not, the best of feeling seemed to exist between them; and the only deduction the Young Patrol could make was that the future would find them acting together, and that, too, against Pilgrims' Bar.

Determined to lose no time in retracing his footsteps, and putting the camp on its guard, he arose to depart. As he did so he received a blow on the head from a bludgeon in the hands of an unseen foe, that sent him reeling backward through the undergrowth into full glare of the camp-fire where, striking his heel against a rock, he fell to the ground.

Half-dazed by the blow the youth sprang to his feet when, to elude a second blow from his assailant who lunged through the bushes upon him, he sprang backward, drew his revolver and fired. The man fell dead. Saul made a bound for the shadows, but was met by no less than three outlaws, who seized upon him and crowded him back into the light.

By this time the whole camp was aroused, and when, by superhuman efforts, Saul succeeded in getting free of his three assailants, he was surrounded by the entire party, a dozen of whom had him covered with their revolvers.

"Stand!" shouted a man before him, "or you'll be riddled!"

In the struggle with the three men Saul had lost his revolver; but now drawing his knife, he flashed a look over the excited faces before him that involuntarily widened the circle around him.

"Well, what in the name of the prophets has broke loose?" asked Darral, as he pushed his way into the circle.

"We caught a feller spyin' round camp," replied one of the three men with whom Saul had come in contact, "but the sneakin' varmint has finished poor Joel Sands, and now defies us all!"

"Ugh!" ejaculated a little, ferret-eyed Indian, as he caught sight of Saul's face in the light of the camp-fire, "he still spirit—big shoot! He kill Wolf-Foot when Wolf-Foot go to camp and git white squaw and ride away!"

"You're right, most noble Cobra-Head," declared a dark-visaged man of undoubted Spanish blood; and then turning to Darral, he continued: "Señor Darral, behold Silent Saul, the Mountain Patrol, whom you'd just expressed a wish to see."

Bishop Darral uttered an exclamation of surprise when, for the first time, he looked upon the Young Patrol; but when his eyes met those of the youth, he started back as if with sudden fear. There was something in the light of those flashing orbs that none but Darral seemed to realize. It sent a shiver through his frame, and he turned away to escape the boy's gaze.

Half a dozen outlaws brought flaming torches from the fire and held them aloft. In their wavering light the figure of the Young Patrol stood fully revealed—tall, erect, his head bare, and his pale, stern-set features framed in by his long, disheveled, yellow hair.

"Lord!" exclaimed Darral, who, having recovered his composure, once more turned his eyes upon the youth, "don't he do the tragical in fine style? But, boys, that's all bluff. I command you, in the name of the prophets, to take him prisoner."

Quickly Silent Saul turned and waved the human hyenas back. His face grew white as death, while the circles of his eyes seemed to burst into wheels of consuming fire.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHIRLPOOL TRAGEDY AND MYSTERY.

THE ruffian assailants of Silent Saul hesitated and drew back as if awed by that terrible look. It was plain to all that he meant to fight, and that to attack him would be certain death to some of them before he could be overpowered.

"It's no use firin' up, young man," expostulated Darral. "You've overdone the thing to-day in shootin' two of our men, and you must answer to the Avenging Angels for those deaths. Furthermore, we propose to know who Silent Saul is that we've heard so much about."

The mute threw back his head, exposing his white, smooth neck, and pointed to the red scar upon his throat. Then he touched his lips, shook his head, and again motioned the mob back with a quick, nervous sweep of the arm.

Some of the wretches laughed at him and made light of his infirmities; but there were a few others who experienced a strange feeling of terror creeping over them whenever they met the burning glances of the Young Patrol's eyes.

"Say, men," suddenly spoke up Revenue Bill,

the bandit, "isn't this matter hanging fire? If you're afraid to attack the Patrol, let him depart. He's no coward, you can rest assured."

"Close in on him, men!" shouted the "Bishop," at a safe distance from the defiant, fearless foe. The circle began to move. Those on the outside crowded the others inward.

Cobra-Head, the Indian, dropped forward on his hands, and by a quick movement essayed to seize the youth by the ankles from behind; but, quick as he was, Silent Saul was quicker, and with a downward and backward sweep of the arm, the keen blade of his knife dashed across the red-skin's neck with such force as to almost sever the head from the shoulders!

The mob, however, took advantage of the moment and rushed in upon the young mountaineer like a pack of wolves. But with a giant's strength the mute plied that terrible knife and fought like a madman until, by sheer force, he was overpowered, borne to the earth and bound hand and foot.

Saul's hands being tied, the Bishop had no hesitation in facing him, and taunting him with vile epithets and curses.

"What shall we do with him, Bishop?" one "Rocky" Lake finally asked, eager to avenge the death of his friends.

"Cook him!" cried the "Saint." "Away with him to the Devil's Stew-Kettle, and plunge him in alive, with a stone about his neck! He'll make good Satan's broth. Away with him to the Kettle!"

With a wild shout of approval, and the prospect of some excitement more to their taste, the infuriated mob hurried away through the woods with the prisoner to the edge of the whirlpool, a dozen men with flaming torches, leading the way.

To make sure of the depth of the pool a man tied a stone to the end of a lariat and lowered it into the water. It was fully fifteen feet deep.

"Oh! it's a noble ole pot-hole!" declared the man making the measurement, "and'll hold its secret till doomsday."

While three or four stones were being tied to the stalwart form of the Young Patrol, Darral confronted him, saying:

"Youngster, this comes of your nosing around in other people's affairs, and of being too handy with pistol and knife. You've long been suspected of being a spy and scout of those who would destroy the Church of the Saints and all its believers. But Mormonism is deep-rooted, and is here to stay, despite the power of its enemies. Yours is to be the fate of many others who have crossed the path of the Avenging Angels; and if you have anything to say—to communicate before you go, you can now have the opportunity of doing so."

Silent Saul drew himself proudly erect, his brows contracted and his lips curled with scorn. Then he flashed a look of defiance at Darral and at the mob around him, while an expression of cold disdain settled upon his face.

"Oh, but he's gamey!" observed an outlaw; "it seems like a pity to waste such rattlin' good pluck!"

A frown clouded the brow of Darral when he heard this remark, and through fear that too much sympathy for the doomed youth might be created by further delay, he ordered two men, named Conklin and Bard, to put an end to their work.

Stepping forward, the two, one on either side of the Young Patrol, lifted him bodily from the ground and advanced to the edge of the rock overhanging the whirlpool. As they did so, the doomed mountaineer, as if eager to meet death, threw himself forward with such force that, before the man Conklin could release his hold upon him, he was thrown out of balance on the edge of the basin, and, with the silent youth, plunged headlong into the whirlpool!

A cry of horror burst from the outlaws and Mormons as they saw their confederate disappear beneath the boiling flood with their victim.

Throwing himself, face downward, upon the rock, with head and shoulders hanging over the whirlpool, Bard watched for Conklin to rise to the surface. He had but a few moments to wait. The man was suddenly thrown to the surface of the boiling caldron and whirled around and around, his face wearing an expression of appalling agony. The swirling waters carried him close to the basin's rim, when Bard seized him by the arm, and, with other help, the victim was lifted from the "Kettle."

To the surprise of his friends, Conklin could not speak, nor could he stand or sit; and as he sunk heavily to the ground, he was seized with a violent fit of coughing, which was followed

by a gush of blood from his mouth and nostrils that almost strangled him.

"He's ruptured a blood-vessel!" exclaimed Darral, excitedly.

"Open his collar, and loosen his belt!" cried another.

This was done, but it afforded the man no relief, and, a few moments later, he was taken with convulsions and in two minutes was dead.

An expression of genuine sorrow and pain rested upon the face of the Bishop. He took a torch and advancing to the edge of the whirlpool gazed down into the vortex of waters. No sign of Saul could be seen, and the fact seemed to afford him some relief.

Meanwhile Bard examined the body of his pard. He could not believe his death had been caused by drowning, for he had not been in the water to exceed forty seconds. His friends did not share in this belief, but when he revealed to their gaze two wounds in Conklin's breast, that looked as if they had been made by knife-stabs, they were forced to accept the truth, startling as it was.

Bard probed the wounds with his finger. Both were clean-cut and deep. The outlaws and Mormons stood aghast. There was some frightful mystery connected with this tragedy, for it seemed utterly impossible for the angry waters to have hurled him against any hidden, knife-like projections that would have inflicted such a clean, deep and mortal wound. And yet, what else could have done it? They were dead sure the mute Saul had not dealt those blows, for, with both hands and feet bound, and weighted with stones, he had gone to the bottom of the pool like a bullet, and had never appeared again!

For the second time, Darral, accompanied by Revenue Bill, went back and gazed down into the waters which seemed laughing and gurgling with conscious, fiendish glee; but they could discover nothing that would even suggest a solution of the mystery of Conklin's death.

With the body of their friend the party finally took their departure for camp.

Darral was the last to leave, and when but a few paces away he stopped, turned around and went back once more to the edge of the whirlpool. He was under a horrible fascination. He could not resist it, although conscious of the subtle power that enslaved him. On the edge of the basin he stopped, and as he gazed down into the waters, holding a torch above his head, he heard a voice—a strange, hollow voice that seemed to bubble up from the very depths of the whirlpool, saying:

"Lafayette! Lafayette! thy doom is sealed!"

A shiver ran through every fiber of the frame of the Bishop. He reeled, turned and fled the spot as if to escape the wrath of an avenging God!

CHAPTER V.

THE MAIDEN'S STORY.

THE disappearance of Old Mahomet had a tendency to throw the entire camp off its balance, for never since his advent into Pilgrims' Bar until this time had they felt such an interest in the strange and eccentric old man.

Bloom still delayed calling on the maiden in hopes that night would send Mahomet in, or at least that Silent Saul might bring some information regarding his unaccountable departure from the settlement.

In the mean time every miner in camp proceeded to clean up his fire-arms and load them ready for any emergency.

As soon as night set in four men were sent to guard Bloom's cabin and the Protégée of Pilgrims' Bar.

Most of the men were assembled at the City Hall discussing the events of the day and speculating what the morrow would bring forth. Two or three hours thus passed when the silence, so unusual in that place, was broken by the sudden appearance of Old Mahomet, who came bounding into the room as chipper as a youth of twenty, and without the least apparent concern marched up to the bar and called for a drink. And not until he had received and quaffed the liquor did he deign to answer any of the volley of questions or criticisms fired at him.

"Now, pards," he said, as he placed the empty glass on the bar, "I'm ready for you. By the way, some o' you chaps seem to mistrust me in goin' out to take an evenin' ramble. Is there anything 'bout my classic face, or gymnastic form, or stoic garb that savors of Druidical mystery? Do I look like an unfathomable abyss in which are concealed deep, dark and woolly secrets? Do I look like a Danite league, or a gnome of darkness that feeds and fattens on spirits of the night washed down with moun-

tain-dews? Say, what kind of an old lally-whooper do you take me for?"

"Pard," responded Bloom, "what did ye leave us for, anyhow, when your wise counsel war so greatly needed to keep our ears from gittin' lonesome?"

"To take a walk—a ramble for a health-lift," Mahomet answered, with a good-natured smile. "You know I dote on night atmosphere for my lungs. Hav'n't I told you my doctor sent me into this salubrious clime for my health? But say, pards, let me tell you that you can look out for a visit, sooner or later, from a gang of outlaws made up of Mormon bishops and laymen, Ingins, Mexicans and the Lord only knows who else."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Bloom.

"True as Gospel. They're in camp up the river now, for I saw 'em with my own eyes. I think Revenue Bill's in the crowd."

"It would be a poor time for that thief to strike Pilgrims' Bar," averred Marshal Hazen, "for it was only two days ago we sent our dust all over to Carson."

"Yes; but to convince him of that fact," suggested Mahomet, "might prove a difficult task. But, boys, remember we must, for the gal's sake, avoid all troubles, even if we have to make a little sacrifice one way and another."

This last remark sounded a little queer, if not suspicious; but, as Old Mahomet was past finding out, as the months he had been at Pilgrims' Bar had demonstrated, he was not called upon to explain. In fact, Mayor Bloom changed the subject by inquiring:

"Mahomet, did you see anything o' Silent Saul while ye war refreshin' yer lungs?"

"Not a thing! Fact is, I'd forgot 'bout him entirely; but say, Swanzy," and the old Puzzle turned to the barkeeper, "set out the 'snake-wake' for the house."

"Look here, pard," exclaimed the mayor, "you don't want to spile yer breath, for you and me's p'inted a committee to call on the Protégée."

"Oh, murder! no!" Mahomet replied in great surprise; "me a com'ity to call on the angel? Well, then, Swanzy, no more 'snake-work' for me; but, dish it out to the boys jist as long as a Pinte of them wants to make hisself a serpent's den."

In his exuberance of spirit the old Puzzle was liberal, both in purse and language, and while his friends availed themselves of his liberality to take one drink around, they were too cautious, and some of them even suspicious, to muddle their brains with liquor.

Finally Bloom and Mahomet left the saloon and proceeded to call on the maiden, whom they found quite composed after her day's experience. She seemed much pleased to see them.

"Miss Stranger," Bloom began, as he seated himself on a stool after some preliminary remarks, "we've called on you to inquire what yer handle—I mean yer name might be, and what sent you into this 'ere camp."

The girl glanced from one to the other of her visitors, evidently pleased with the interest they took in her welfare, and seating herself she answered:

"My name is Numa Custer; and, as to a home, I have none other now than this," and a look of pain passed over her fair face, and her eyes filled with mist.

"Numa Custer?" repeated Mahomet thoughtfully, his squint eye closing tight, while the other fixed a searching glance upon the maiden; "but, where did you come from, Numa?"

"I came from the settlement near Beaver," she answered, "a fugitive from Mormon persecution."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Mahomet, excitedly slapping his knee with his hand; "by the jump-in' Jacobins, I knew it! That cussed Mormon Church is—"

"Hold up, Mahomet!" interposed the mayor; "keep your shirt—I mean, keep yer temper, for yer' in the presence o' ladies."

"Scuse me, Miss Custard," the old man said, apologetically; "go on with your story and I'll keep the may'r still if I have to chloroform him 'ith that 'are pick-handle. Have you no friends—relatives, Miss Numa?"

"I have a brother," the girl replied, "if he has not been killed by the Saints. We lived in the valley not far from the ranch of Bishop Darral. Our father settled there, years ago—before Darral or any other Mormon had come into the valley. After undergoing hardships and privations—the worst of all being the death of mother—father accumulated some property and built us a nice, pleasant home. Meantime the Mormons kept coming into the valley and settling around us."

"All went well, as we supposed, until one day father disappeared. We do not know to this day what became of him, although he disappeared two months ago. We were satisfied, however, that he had been murdered by the Mormons, for father was very bitter and outspoken in his hatred of the Saints."

"Brother Tom and I said nothing of our suspicions. We were heirs to our father's property, and resolved to sell everything and leave the country as other Gentiles have had to do. Bishop Darral contracted for all our possessions. He was to pay five thousand dollars for the same, one month afterward, on the day that I became of legal age. Before that longed-for day came around, Bishop Darral visited our house, and told me that he had had a revelation in which it was revealed to him that it was the Lord's wish I should be made his fourth and most cherished wife—"

"The tumultuous ole hellonian! Why didn't you whang some hot water into his face—scald his eyes out, the leprous ole cancer! Jumpin' Jacobins! I'd like to 'a' been out and around—"

"Whist, Mahomet! Clap the breaks onto that lip o' yours," interrupted Bloom, with an impatient tap of the heel.

"Pardon me, Miss Custer, for I had to let it out."

With a smile at the eccentric old man's apparent confusion, Numa continued:

"The idea of me being the wife of Darral, even if he had been a single man, was revolting. I denounced him to his face as a human monster, and his church as a blighting curse—"

"Bully! bully!" broke in the impulsive Mahomet; "served the old leper right! But 'scuse me ag'in."

"My reply to him," Numa went on, "so enraged him that he swore he would make me and Tom both beggars if I refused to become his wife. I did not know then what he really meant by the threat, or, at least, how he intended to accomplish his designs of making us beggars. But, two days ago I found out."

"The day I reached my eighteenth year Tom and I went before a magistrate and signed the papers conveying to Darral all our property in consideration of the sum of five thousand dollars."

"With the papers brother Tom proceeded to the ranch of Darral to complete the sale. Darral wanted to examine the deeds, and Tom handed them to him. He read them over and then coolly put them in his pocket, at the same time producing another paper which he held up, saying:

"Thomas, here is a paper—a sort of a note and mortgage together—calling for just five thousand dollars, and binding the heirs, assigns and executors of the maker for the payment of the same. The man who gave this note, Thomas, was your own father, and I must apply the purchase price of his estate—your property and Numa's—on the note."

"To brother Tom this news came like a thunderbolt, for he had never heard of such an obligation before. He declared it a forgery. Darral bade him examine it. The signature was that of John C. Worth. The instrument had been dated at Kentonville, Kentucky, sixteen years previous."

"Ah! indeed?" exclaimed Mahomet, with a nervous start; "was that note made payable to Bishop Darral?"

"No, sir; it was made payable to Daniel Kirk, 'or bearer.' Darral claimed to have purchased the note of Kirk a day or two before that man's mysterious disappearance from Kentonville."

"Well, what did your brother say?"

"He told Darral that even if the note was genuine, it had become outlawed—that the statute of limitations would debar collection."

"A cold, mocking laugh escaped the Mormon's lips, and holding the back of the note so that Tom could see it, he said: 'Do you see that indorsement? A few days before your father's death or disappearance, he paid me one hundred dollars on the note, and that indorsement renews the obligation!'"

"But if the note was signed by John C. Worth, how could it be John Custer's obligation?" queried Mayor Bloom.

"I was just coming to that," Numa replied. "I am going to tell you all, however painful it may be to me. Brother Tom threatened to invoke the aid of the law unless Darral returned our papers or paid for the property. To this the Mormon replied that, in such an event, he would be compelled to show that John Custer was John C. Worth, and that he was a fugitive from justice—that an indictment stood against

him on the court records of the State of Kentucky for the murder of Daniel Kirk, to whom the note was made payable."

"Gentlemen, I know my father's name was Worth, and that he dropped that name when he left Kentucky. I also know that his whole life was under a cloud, and he had promised to tell us all some time. He may have been charged with Kirk's murder, but I cannot think my dear, kind father was such a criminal. Darral knew our great love for our father and his memory, and he thought Tom would pay the note rather than have the stigma cast upon ourselves as well as on our father's name."

"And in this he was, in a measure, correct. Tom saw that the man had the advantage of him because all the officers of justice thereabout were Mormons, and he could hope for nothing by going to law; so when Darral saw that Tom was disposed to settle the note, though it would make us penniless, he proposed a compromise which he thought would meet Tom's prompt approval. He proposed that if I would marry him he would settle for half the face of the note!"

"But, the wretch was mistaken in his man. It was an insult to Tom's manhood, and he flew at the detestable villain's throat and would have choked the life out of him, had friends, whom he had within reach, not come to his assistance."

"Gallant fellow! How I'd like to embrace him!" declared Mahomet, rubbing his palms together in glee.

"When brother turned to leave the Mormon's presence, he told Tom that he would keep our papers, and that he should marry me if it took all Mormonism to perform the ceremony, and that we could make up our minds to that end."

"Tom came home and told me all, and we at once prepared for flight. The following night we rode away from our dear old home, fugitives from man's injustice. We determined to seek refuge among the miners of New Mexico, and from there go wherever it seemed best and safest. But it seems Darral had kept a watch on our movements, for we soon found that we were being pursued."

"Ten miles from here Tom's horse fell lame, and he was forced to quit his saddle. He bade me ride on, giving me directions by which I could reach your camp. Here he hoped to join me. But poor, brave Tom! I am afraid something has happened to him, or he would have been here ere this."

"Don't git discouraged, little 'un," urged Mahomet, encouragingly; "if Tom don't show up to-night, we'll look after him. As game a fellow as he ar'n't goin' to be caught asleep. And as for Bishop Darral, don't be afraid. I'll look after him a few, also. I'll larn the old villain that he can't have all the pretty women for wives, while I go peggin' round without a single one. No, sir; so fur as this wife business is concerned, thar's got to be a dividend struck."

"But, oh! what juicy souls are them Mormon 'pillars' like Darral! What a glorious institoosun it is that robs the orphans and murders the soul of innocence! Great and enlightened America! to thee I sing! 'Freedom!' screeches thy grand old eagle from his perch on your banner, while low in the valleys of social life the ravens are pluckin' out the eyes of helpless innocence and tearin' its heartstrings to flinders! Mayor Bloom, do you know that the word 'Deseret' signifies Virtue and Industry? That's the name the Mormons gave to Utah, their adopted land. Oh, pestilence! it makes me swoony-sick, delirious to think 'bout it!"

Mebby then you'd better rest yer brain, 'Hommet," facetiously suggested the mayor, "and see if silence won't be an antidote for your nervous oppression. I'd like to ax Miss Numa if Bishop Darral has much infloence 'mong the folks up his way?"

"He has among his class," Numa answered; "he is not a bishop, yet the leader of the church in that vicinity. His word is law, and his law that of a cruel and tyrannical man. Brother Tom always believed that he was directly in league with the bandit, Revenue Bill. Suspicious characters have been seen coming and going to and from his ranch in the night when honest people were at rest."

"Darral complained of Revenue Bill having made three different 'assessments' on him, and while his story may have been true, father and Tom believed it was all a blind."

"Father was 'assessed' twice by the Bandit Collector, and as both calls were made within a day after he had sold some property, it was plain enough that some one in the settlement kept the outlaws posted."

"The frisky Bill must have a spy in every

settlement and camp," declared Bloom, "unless it is ours. I reckon he considers us so church-mously poor that he can't 'ford to keep a spy 'mong us. At any rate, he's never yit tried to collect any revenue off Pilgrims' Bar. But he's made other camps come down powerful heavy with the dust."

"Queer he can't be gathered to his daddies," observed Mahomet, unable to keep still longer.

"He's too many friends among his enemies," Numa Custer said, with great earnestness.

"Mayor Bloom," Mahomet said, suddenly springing to his feet, "if you'll excuse me, I'll retire. Good-night, Miss Numa!" and he abruptly left the room, much to the surprise of the mayor.

"He is a funny old man," Numa remarked.

"He's a regular old puzzle," averred Bloom, "past solvin'. I know we've suspected him of everything evil and good since he's been at Pilgrims' Bar; but he always comes around in such a way as to completely dispel our suspicions of the evil part, at any rate."

"I noticed he became quite restless and uneasy when I spoke of Revenue Bill having friends among his enemies."

"Ah! indeed?" exclaimed the mayor; "I noticed that, and it was so marked that I mentally said to myself that, if Revenue Bill *should* come to this camp soon, I'd charge it up to Mahomet as being his friend and spy."

The mayor had scarcely ceased speaking when the door was suddenly thrown open and a miner rushed in in great excitement, exclaiming:

"Mayor Bloom, you're wanted at the City Hall! Revenue Bill, the Bandit Collector, and his gang are there, demanding forty ounces o' clean dust, or the blood o' every man in Pilgrims' Bar!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE BANDIT COLLECTOR COLLECTS.

THE "City Hall" was about forty rods from Bloom's cabin, yet it required but a few minutes for the mayor to travel this distance. He took with him two of the men on guard at his cabin, for he felt certain every man would be needed.

Reaching the saloon, he found the door closed and barred; but, upon demanding admittance, it was opened and he and his companions were permitted to enter the room, where a sight met their view that was enough to have appalled even stouter hearts than theirs.

The place was virtually in the possession of the outlaws, who to the number of a score and a half, stood aligned along the south side and east end of the spacious room, every man with a glistening revolver in each hand.

Americans, Mexicans and Indians—all fierce, desperate and savage-looking fellows were represented in that line. At the end nearest the door stood the notorious outlaw chief, Revenue Bill—a comparatively young man, with a tall, lithe figure, a bearded face, a long, straight nose, and keen, flashing gray eyes. There was in his dress, the poise of the head and the general expression of the face a dash of reckless abandon; but aside from this he had less the appearance of an outlaw than any one of his followers.

Old Mahomet, from a position with Swanzy behind the bar, piped out as Bloom entered the room:

"There's Joshua Bloom, the Mayor o' Pilgrims' Bar."

"Glad to make your acquaintance, mayor," said the Bandit Collector, bowing to Bloom. "This is the first time I have had the pleasure of meeting you, I believe."

"I reckon your room 'd be as 'ceptable as your presence now, and 'ford me fully as much pleasure," was Bloom's rejoinder, given in a tone that betrayed a little excitement to his friends.

"Well, I presume so," Revenue Bill continued; "that's about the way they all feel that I call on, though they don't just have the words always at command to say so. But, as you know, I am Revenue William, the Bandit Collector, and hope you have not been offended at my not calling sooner. All my 'assessments' are made for the benefit of the widows and orphans, missionary and church purposes, and no charitably inclined person can complain. Now, I have made your assessment light this time—very light, considering the low state of our funds. Forty clean ounces we want of you, and, in the language of the poet, we want it p. d. q."

"Old hoss, do you take the miners o' Pilgrims' Bar for real tender-hoofs?" demanded Bloom, keeping his temper under fine control.

"Not at all, my dear sir!" blandly responded the outlaw; "I take you for sensible, prosperous 'placers' who will pay your assessment like men and without delay."

"Suppose we refuse, point-blank, to submit to bein' robbed?" suggested Bloom.

"You'd be very foolish, indeed," answered the outlaw, mildly.

"Well, s'pose I was to inform you there isn't ten ounces o' dust in this camp?"

"Oh, I wouldn't believe you, that's all," blandly smiling.

"But it's the case, just the same," declared the mayor; "only two days ago we sent all our dust to Carson. You're three days too late, I'm pleased to say."

"That's the old, old story the other camps used to tell us, but when we put on the screws they managed to rake together the necessary revenue. Now we dislike blood—we detest it; but, with us its gold or gore. We've never left a place yet without one or the other—generally the gold. Now, business is business. We've dallied long enough. If the dust or its equivalent is not forthcoming, there won't be a cabin left standing in Pilgrims' Bar to-morrow morning. A camp that can't pay a small assessment don't deserve to exist, and if there isn't men enough here to rub it out, a whistle will soon fetch more. We take no risks."

"Bah!" exclaimed Mahomet, "you can't skeer this community with your wild wind, ole rooster! We don't want no tumult, but we're not goin' to stand still and let you do all the shootin' and blood-spillin' if it comes to a fight."

Upon the ears of Joshua Bloom these words fell like mockery, for the suspicion he had formed at his cabin, of Old Mahomet's true character, was now stronger than ever. He believed Mahomet had brought the outlaws there, and at a time, too, when he knew there was not five ounces of gold in the camp. In view of this fact, it looked as though the old spy wished to precipitate a bloody conflict, or else afford an opportunity to carry Numa away.

To the miners it looked as though a collision with the outlaws could scarcely be averted. True, they outnumbered the robbers, but the latter were well-armed and disciplined men, while they—the miners—were without training or organization, and some of them armed with inferior weapons. But they were fearless men, and as their minds reverted to the maiden—the Protégée of Pilgrims' Bar—and the oath they had taken to defend her with their lives, their courage grew stronger.

And yet there were few of the miners who would not have made any reasonable concession to avert a conflict on account of the girl. For her sake they would have suffered humiliation—anything. Readily enough, would they have given the bandit the gold he asked had they possessed it, but every man, save one, knew there was little dust in camp; and so a fight seemed the only alternative.

The keen and observing eye of Revenue Bill saw that the miners were disposed to a pacific policy, and yet were slow to act. This he thought came of a want of understanding among them; so he said:

"You Pilgrimites can discuss this matter 'mong yourselves over there; but, understand, no two can leave the room alive. If you haven't the dust with you, you can go, one at a time, and bring it. You see we know exactly how many men are in this camp, and that all but two or three are right before us. If there's to be shooting we don't want any one firing into us from behind."

"Then let me out," demanded Mahomet, gruffly, advancing toward the door.

Revenue Bill stood aside and the old man passed out into the night.

Again Mayor Bloom's suspicions were aroused, and a chill ran through his frame as he thought of the almost wholly unprotected girl, Numa.

Some five minutes, however, had passed in badinage of words and threats, which came near resulting in blows between the miners and outlaws, when Mahomet returned, carrying in his hand a buckskin bag well filled. Placing the bag on the counter, he said, addressing Swanzy, the barkeeper:

"Swanzy, thar's some dust; weigh out carefully the mount demanded by these blood-suckers, and let 'em depart and die."

Swanzy poured out the gold and began weighing it.

Mahomet's friends were completely astounded. Where had the lazy old Puzzle obtained so much gold—some of it being nuggets of many dollars in value? It was a decided mystery.

Joshua Bloom could scarcely believe he was not dreaming.

Swanzy soon weighed out the required amount of dust, though there was little left in the bag.

"Well, well," remarked Bill, slightly sarcastic, "I—I thought there might be a little stuff 'round this camp, and here comes one man alone with all we ask. I'll swear, I've a notion to double the assessment. But, Sonora, go examine that dust and see if it's all right before we accept it."

Sonora, a little, weazen-faced, black-eyed Mexican, advanced and carefully examined the gold, even applying, or pretending to, at least, an acid test to the nuggets. Finally he said:

"It's all the pure oil, Señor Captain; and finer lump I have never seen from the Utah—Nevada—Arizona placers."

"Gentlemen," said Revenue Bill, with his bland smile, "I receipt in full for this assessment with my sincere thanks. You have done this thing very handsomely, indeed, and when we call again we hope we'll find you better fixed. And now, to make our word good, we'll retire without even taking a drink with you. Good-evening, gentlemen of Pilgrims' Bar! About face, men! Forward! march!"

Throwing open the door, Revenue Bill passed out into the night, and was immediately followed by his band.

Scarcely had the last man filed from the room before Mahomet, upon whom all eyes and thoughts were fixed, turned to the miners, and said:

"Boys, it cut deep into me, but I gave the dust for her sake! I see'd that a fight meant death to us, and slow murder to the Protégée, who is more precious than all the gold in the land!"

The miners applauded the old man's remarks, while a pang of remorse smote the breast of Joshua Bloom. He felt that he had wronged the old Riddle.

But this feeling lasted for only a few moments, for a man burst into the room, his face and clothes covered with blood. It was Mat Redmon, one of the men left to guard Numa Custer!

"Boys!" he gasped, half choked with blood, as he reeled across the room, "the girl! the girl—she's gone!"

CHAPTER VII.

AN APPARITION.

MAYOR BLOOM left Numa Custer in a state of dreadful suspense. The news brought by the miner, of Revenue Bill being at the saloon, forced upon her already overwrought brain a terrible fear.

Full well she knew the character of that bandit, and she could not help but associate Bishop Darral and his crimes with those of the outlaw. And in view of these facts she was sorely afraid that her presence there had something to do with the visit of the freebooters.

Thus one distressing thought after another forced itself upon her mind until terror took possession of her. She arose and paced the floor, a wild and haggard look upon her fair young face.

A dead silence reigned—a silence that she momentarily expected to be broken by the murderous crash of revolvers. The very air in the room grew stifling. Her temples began to throb and her breast to fill with a weight that threatened to suffocate her.

At length her suffering and suspense became unbearable. She took up her hat and shawl and turned to flee the place, but only to start back, for the door swung open and a man entered.

A cry of terror burst from her lips, and she reeled back across the floor, almost falling. The man was her enemy, Bishop Darral!

"Oho!" the saint exclaimed, a leer of triumph upon his face; "so I have found my little lady-truant at last!"

The very sound of his hateful voice acted like magic upon the maiden's heart and brain and transformed her fear and suspense into rage and scorn. The haggard look upon her face was changed to defiance, and with form erect, eyes flashing, and her little hands clinched, she exclaimed:

"Bishop Darral, leave my presence, or I will have you ejected! You have dogged my steps here for no good purpose! You know I detest—loathe your very presence!"

"You'll git over that," responded the Mormon.

"Leave here, Bishop Darral!" again commanded the girl, "or I will call the miners."

"Call away, if you wish," the man said, with a grin; "call till Judgment Day, if you will, for little good it will do you, my tragic queen. I

am here to escort you home and make you Mrs. Darral, No. 4."

"I prefer death a thousand times!" declared the maiden.

"Perhaps; but one can't always have his preference in this wicked world."

"Bishop Darral," Numa said, with unflinching courage, "you have robbed us of our home and property, and now you would destroy my soul! Man, I give you warning; beware!"

"Tut! tut! foolish child; your home and property were virtually made of the money your father owed me. But I intend you shall be mistress of your old home, and as my wife live like the little queen that you are."

"Shame upon you, Bishop Darral!" rebuked the girl; "your heartless cruelty and mockery will be avenged as sure as there is a just God! Leave me, I say, leave my presence!"

A sardonic laugh escaped the Mormon's lips.

"Well," he added, "there's no use arguing with you, so you'd as well put on your hat and go peaceably, for go you shall; and the sooner the better, for at this very moment a band of outlaws are in Pilgrims' Bar, and it'll be worse for you if you fall into Revenue Bill's hands."

"I would prefer being in his power to yours," retorted the girl, "for I will not go with you!"

And she drew further back from the sanctimonious scoundrel.

"Oh, but you must," he rejoined. "I see I've got to call in help and carry you away by force."

He stepped to the door and gave a low whistle, when two men—strangers to Numa—at once entered the cabin.

A single candle lighted the room, and its feeble rays scarcely dispelled the shadows from the remote corners of the apartment. Into one of these angles Numa shrunk with terror.

"Men," commanded the Mormon dignitary, "the little Gentile's as obstreperous as a mustang filly, so we'll have to pick her up and lug her off in our arms. You need have no fears in doing so, of the fate of the Indian, for the Devil's Stew-Pot holds deep in its embrace Silent Saul who thwarted the Pintah. Advance, men, and take hold of her."

The two ruffians started toward the maiden, but had taken only a step when they recoiled in terror from an apparition that confronted them.

Like a phantom, noiseless and sudden, a shadowy form had come between them and the girl. It was the tall form of a beardless man with long yellow hair, a face that looked corpse-like in the dim light, but with eyes that glowed with red, quivering fire of deadly wrath!

It was the form and face of the murdered Silent Saul, the Mountain Patrol!

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS DELIVERANCE.

BISHOP DARRAL and his two confederates stood motionless—dumb with terror before that apparition of the young mountaineer—the ghost of the dead Patrol! Their wicked and superstitious minds could admit of no doubt upon this score, for they had not only seen, but aided with their own hands and counsel, in the horrible execution at the Devil's Stew-Kettle.

To Numa Custer the youth appeared, not alone in the spirit, but in the flesh. Despite the whirlpool, the bonds upon his hands and feet, and the stones lashed upon his body, Silent Saul lived to confront his executioners.

That he did live was, indeed, a mystery to even himself.

When he had been led to the edge of the pool, weighed down with stones, and securely tied, he became resigned to his fate and commended his soul to God, knowing all hopes were out of the question.

Thus prepared for his doom, he went down into the whirlpool, and for a few moments his mind was filled with a confusion of thoughts; there was a roaring in his ears and a burning pressure on his brain. He became vaguely conscious of being swirled and dragged through the seething pool, and at length seemed landed where there was a falling away of the waters around him. Then the pressure on his brain removed. But he could still hear the sullen roar of the perturbed waters, and darkness was 'round and about him.

Was this death? Had he passed from earth to the great Beyond?

These and kindred thoughts flashed through his wild brain which had, at no time, entirely lost consciousness, but he was unable to penetrate the vale of darkness surrounding him, and keep pace with the moments that were crowded with the thoughts and events of hours. He was conscious of existence in some state, for he could

breathe and move, and all the while he could feel what seemed restless, nimble fingers pulling at his clothing, and passing, cold and clammy, over his face and hands. And this continued until he seemed to hear a voice say:

"Boy, how are you now?"

At sound of the voice Silent Saul sat up. He looked around him, but all was darkness, and the roaring waters, and the damp air he breathed, all confused him.

Oh! if he could only speak!

"Boy," he again heard that voice ask, and at the same time felt his hand grasped by the cold fingers of the speaker, "do you hear and understand what I say to you? Do you realize that you've been saved from the pool? Within fifteen seconds after you dropped into the Kettle, I had you dragged here, under the falls, at the very brink of the pool into which you could step now. Them outlaw wretches know it not, although I could not forego the temptation to put the steel into the villain that fell into the pot with you. Yes, Saul, you are as good as ever. I got to the bottom of the 'pot' soon as you did. To cut your bonds and unload you of your weights was no work for me. You keeled over when I got you out of the water, but I knew you wasn't bad off, and as I've had much experience with such cases, I soon got you into shape. It's been an hour since you war consigned to the 'Stew-Kettle,' and your enemies are gone, feeling sure your form reposes in fifteen feet of ice-cold water. Oh! what a surprise it will be to them, when you come smiling up before them, serene as a summer morn. Boy, do you realize—do you understand your situation?"

Silent Saul answered by a warm pressure of the hand.

"Good!" exclaimed his rescuer; "now, here's a vial of liquor; take a swallow and it'll kill the nausea in your stomach, and then, whenever you wish to depart, I'll land you safely on shore, where you can settle with your enemies."

Saul took a draught of the liquor, for, as the unknown had rightly judged, he felt faint and sick. The stimulant acted like magic, and soon the Young Mountain Patrol felt little the worse for the terrible ordeal through which he had passed.

Finally he made known his desire to depart, when his friend guided him from the damp and dismal hole under the falls to the shore.

It was so dark outside that the youth could recognize nothing familiar except the starry sky above him. But for this he might still have doubted his earthly existence and rescue from the whirlpool. He soon, however, got his bearings, and then, despite the darkness, things around him began to assume a familiar air.

But who was his rescuer? He could make out the outlines of a man shorter than himself, but that was all. He could ask no questions—he could not even thank his rescuer, save by a pressure of the hand, for what he had done for him.

The unknown, however, seemed to have read his very thoughts, for he finally said, in a low, strange voice:

"You'd like to know, young man, I feel confident, who has rescued you. I am the genius who presides over this pool—low in whose depths there lies a secret that he who seeks to solve it shall die! You must never reveal to man or woman how you escaped. This I ask as a favor—as a friend. To me this place is sacred, and as such I want you to regard it. I know you will."

Silent Saul grasped and pressed the hand of the "Genius" in a manner that spoke plain as words, and yet he could not help wondering what mystery surrounded this man's life—what secret was hidden with him beneath the mad waters of that dreadful caldron.

The two finally parted. Silent Saul turned his footsteps in the direction of Pilgrims' Bar. As he moved along he removed his buckskin overshirt and threw it over a limb, but the rest of his garments he decided to let undergo the slow process of drying upon his person. It was really the best he could do.

The mute was nearing Pilgrims' Bar when he caught the flash of a light in camp that caused him to stop and ponder. He did not see the flash repeated, but he did hear footsteps and low voices passing near by. Three or four persons, as near as he could make out by ear, were going in a rather stealthy way toward the camp. He could not see them, nor could he recognize their voices until his acute ear suddenly detected the presence of Bishop Darral!

The men stopped. Saul crept closer—so close that he could hear an occasional word. They seemed to be in an impatient mood. They

talked about some "plan" that evidently had been previously arranged. They were irritated with delay—like snarling jackals afraid to attack a quarry still struggling in the throes of a slow death.

Suddenly a light swung to and fro on a bluff overlooking the camp.

"There it is, at last! Come!" ordered the Bishop, and off they moved in the darkness.

CHAPTER IX.

THWARTED SAINTS.

INTO the deserted streets of Pilgrims' Bar, past the saloon, where, at that moment, Revenue Bill and his gang were confronting the miners, on toward the cabin of Mayor Bloom, Darral and his two companions made their way. They seemed to know exactly where they were going, and when the two unsuspecting miners left to guard Numa Custer attempted to stop them there was a brief and silent struggle in the dark; then the guards lay motionless on the earth, while at once into the cabin strode the bishop, leaving his men to watch outside the door. What followed, up to the time the three "saints" were confronted by Silent Saul, has already been recorded.

Numa Custer quickly saw the effect the youth's presence had upon her enemies, but did not know that they were gazing upon what they fully believed was an apparition. She only knew that the presence of him who filled them with terror, revived hope and courage in her own throbbing heart.

For almost a minute the three Mormons stood glaring at the Young Patrol, the unnatural light of whose eyes seemed to paralyze their limbs, while the fear in their cowardly hearts bade them flee.

Saul was empty-handed—weaponless, but he knew wherein lay his power. Slowly lifting his right arm he swung it around toward the door, when, from the hollow of his hand, there seemed to have burst a whirlwind of terror that caught the three Saints and swept them, like dead leaves, from the room, out into the night.

With a faint smile of triumph upon his pale, resolute face, the Young Patrol turned to Numa, slightly inclining his head in kindly recognition; and in an instant, almost, the heart and brain that had raged with the storm of silent passion had become as tranquil as the spirit of Peace.

Numa felt a strange sensation of joy and admiration thrill her soul as her eyes met those of the youth. She advanced and was about to speak when Saul touched his lips and shook his head—movements she rightly interpreted as injunctions of silence. He pointed to her hat and started toward the door, motioning her to follow.

"Do I understand you wish me to go with you, Saul?" the maiden asked.

The answer was a nod of the head.

Numa put on her hat. He had won her utmost faith and confidence.

Saul took a pair of blankets from Bloom's bunk and threw them over his arm; then he and the maiden passed out into the dark.

They had been gone but a few minutes when a man with blood-stained face and hands staggered to the door of the deserted cabin and looked in; then he turned and reeled away through the gloom toward the "City Hall."

CHAPTER X.

"WATCH THAT MAN."

BETWEEN their surprise and rage growing out of the visit of Revenue Bill, and the startling information of the disappearance of Numa, the miners of Pilgrims' Bar were thrown into a state of confusion bordering on frenzy.

Redmon's bloody face told of a desperate struggle at the cabin, but, as he lay in a faint, if not dead, none of the particulars of the conflict could be obtained, and a general stampede from the saloon to the mayor's cabin ensued.

As usual, Mahomet was the first to reach the place. The light was still burning, but to their surprise, they found no signs of a struggle in the cabin; outside, the miner left on guard with Redmon was found dead.

"Furies o' Hades!" cried Bloom, "a terrible mistake has been made here to-night!"

"Yes," affirmed Mahomet, seriously; "while them ramshacklin' hellions were at the saloon, bleedin' our pockets, others were after the gal! And they've got her, too, without the loss of a drop of blood, or so much as a hair of the head, on their part. Oh! it's frightful, men, frightful!"

"Let us return to the hall, and organize for work, men," called out Bloom. "We've been 'millin' round here like a drove o' locoed jack-

asses long enough. We've got to act with some understandin' and together, or fu'st thing we know we'll know nothin', and we've nighly reached that condition now."

Back to the saloon went the crowd. By this time Redmon, under the treatment of Swanzy, the barkeeper, had recovered consciousness, and from him they learned that he and his friend had been beaten down by three unknown men in the darkness, who had approached from down the gulch. Beyond this he knew nothing.

Bloom called the crowd to order.

Amid the silence that followed, Silent Saul entered the room.

A low murmur of applause greeted his appearance.

Pushing his way through the crowd to the light, he wrote a few words upon his tablet and handed it to Bloom. The mayor read the words over to himself; then, as his eyes kindled with a light of joy, he read aloud:

"The maiden is safe—I conducted her to a place of security!"

A yell greeted this joyful news.

"Shades o' Gideon!" exclaimed Mahomet, grasping Saul's hand, "you're a hull salvation league, Saul!—a yaller-headed lallywhooper, that fills my heart with reverence and joy! Now, do tell us what you know about the trouble at the cabin, and the death of poor Sam Jason!"

Saul communicated the facts of Darral's visit to the cabin, and the part he took in Numa's rescue. Beyond the statement that the maiden was safe, he would say nothing to the crowd; but afterward, when alone with Bloom, he told him where he had secreted the persecuted maiden.

The miners took courage and proceeded to effect an organized resistance to the further encroachments and invasions of the outlaws and Mormons. For since Darral had failed in securing Numa, they had no doubt but the villain would repeat his visit to camp.

Four guards were posted in the gulch above and below camp, while Silent Saul volunteered to act as scout, in which capacity Old Mahomet concluded he would act, also.

Saul was about to depart when a miner, Jacal Rees, or "Jackal," as he had been called since the day he landed in Pilgrims' Bar, remarked:

"Look'ee here, pard: s'pose Silent Saul should go away and git killed—how'd we know whar to look for the gal?"

At sound of the man's voice Silent Saul started slightly, and turning, he fixed a searching glance upon the miner's face—a glance which, if not observed by Jackal himself, did not escape the notice of Joshua Bloom and one or two of his friends. It was a look of contempt, and with manifest disdain the young mountaineer turned his back upon the anxious miner.

"Reckon he's ole enuff to take keer of hisself by this time," observed Old Mahomet.

"Jackal" did not insist on his point, but relapsed into a sullen silence.

Saul took out his tablet and wrote thereon, "Watch that man," and handed it to Old Mahomet, who thoughtlessly read it aloud. The impulsive Old Puzzle saw his blunder in an instant, but too late to rectify it.

Jackal turned suddenly upon Saul, his eyes flashing with rage, and demanded:

"What do you mean by that, dummy?"

Saul threw back his head, revealing his white throat, and with his index finger slowly traced the blood-red scar running across it; then turned and left the saloon.

"That feller's a fool—an idiot!" declared Jackal, indignantly, "and he's got to explain hisself or take the consequence."

"I war a darned ole fool, and have got the documents to prove it," declared Old Mahomet, regretfully, "for blabbin' out what the boy writ. But I reckon he thought you war in love with the gal and'd try to run her off if you knowed whar she war. But you'd have thirty or forty rivals if it come to that, for every man in Pilgrims' Bar is struck by the little queen. They're all out and around, 'bout the gal."

Jackal appeared to accept Mahomet's explanation in good humor, and soon left the saloon for his cabin; but an hour later, when his roommates went to their quarters, they discovered he was gone, nor could he be found high or low about camp.

His disappearance recalled the words of Silent Saul, and the miners began to ponder over them. What did the Young Patrol know of Jacal Rees? The fellow had been in Pilgrims' Bar over six months. Where he came from no one knew certain, and as to his past record no one in particular cared. So long as a new-comer

conducted himself according to the customs of the camp his past history was of little concern.

All were well satisfied, however, that Jackal's departure had been hastened by Saul's warning inadvertently blurted out by Old Mahomet; at any event it looked very suspicious.

But what did his leaving portend to Pilgrims' Bar?—to Silent Saul?—to Numa Custer? They could only wait and see.

CHAPTER XI.

RECONNOITERING THE OUTLAW CAMP.

WHEN Silent Saul left camp to reconnoiter, he pushed off in the direction of the outlaws' evening camp, for the double purpose of securing his rifle and belt and noting the movements of the enemy.

Soon after his departure Mahomet left also, but this time not under suspicion, although he fully maintained his character and standing as a living mystery. Where he had obtained the gold—some of it fair-sized nuggets—with which he had paid Revenue Bill's "assessment," his friends knew not, unless he had brought it to the place with him, or else was working a secret pocket somewhere that was fabulous in its accumulations of wealth.

The Old Puzzle went down the gulch, passed the guards, and continuing on, crossed the river and entered the deep pine forest beyond.

A dim light suddenly attracted his attention, and he pushed toward it. He traveled nearly two miles before he came near enough to ascertain its nature. He found it was an outlaw camp—the camp of Revenue Bill, whose hospitality was being extended to the Bishop Saint and his friends.

Of the latter fact Mahomet was morally sure, for he had scarcely got into position where he could command a full view of the camp, when he saw the Bishop and two men enter the radius of light fresh from their adventures at Pilgrims' Bar.

Mahomet heard the Mormon greeted thus, as he walked, with dejected spirit, toward Revenue Bill:

"Why, Bishop, where's your girl? Did you fail in your part?"

"Completely," was the reply of the Saint, a look of chagrin and disappointment on his face.

"How did that happen?" asked the bandit. "We carried out our part, and got our dust so promptly that I had to 'monkey' a little in order to delay things to give you time to do your part. According to what 'Piny' says, there were only four miners absent from the saloon, and two of them were in their cabins on their backs wounded."

"Yes," replied the church dignitary, "that's true, and all went well until we encountered the ghost of Silent Saul."

The bandit captain laughed loudly.

"Oh, it's so!" declared the Bishop, with emphasis.

"Do you mean to say you were defeated by the ghost of Silent Saul?"

"I mean to tell you," the Mormon explained, "that we went to the cabin where the girl was, silenced the two guards, and was in the act of takin' our prize when there came between us a figure, and it was the apparition of Silent Saul!"

"I won't confess to being a coward, for I'm not, under ordinary circumstances, but I do confess my want of courage to battle with the spirits of the dead. Before we were scarcely aware of it we were swept from that room by a power irresistible, yet unseen and unfelt, in a physical sense."

"Hal hal hal!" roared the Collector; "your conscience, Bishop, isn't scouring just right. Your digestion's out of order. If you saw anything, my head on it, it was Silent Saul in the flesh!"

"Impossible!" asserted the Bishop, and his two companions repeated the declaration.

"Well," said Revenue Bill, "seriously, it does seem impossible for him to have escaped that whirlpool weighed down and securely tied as he was. But no man can cram any ghost racket down my throat, and you'll find, later, that Silent Saul is out and around as frisky as ever."

"That you will!" echoed a voice from behind the outlaw, and turning, all saw a man emerge from the shadows and approach the knot of men gathered about Darral and the bandit-chief. Old Mahomet heard and saw him, also. It was the suspected miner, Jacal Rees!

The old scout was tempted to shoot the treacherous scamp and then run for life, but his better judgment prevailed; he kept quiet and watched and listened.

He soon heard enough to satisfy him that "Jackal" was indeed the bandits' spy. He

heard him declare that Silent Saul was in the flesh, that he had rescued Numa from the Bishop and hidden her away in the hills.

"The tongueless young devil!" exclaimed Bill, in surprise, "he must be possessed of supernatural powers after all, else how could he have escaped from that whirlpool, alive? But, boys, we have sworn to see the Bishop through with this matter; so we'll have to make another trip to Pilgrims' Bar to-night. If we can corille the miners again, as we did before, we'll make them trot out the girl as they did the dust."

"But you'll not catch 'em asleep this time," Jackal assured them; "they're wide awake and full of fight."

"Well, we know how to play more tricks than one," averred Revenue Bill; "so, boys, you'll make ready to march at once."

The greatest activity at once prevailed, and Old Mahomet shuddered when he realized what it portended to Pilgrims' Bar!

To prevent the camp from being taken by surprise a second time—for he knew the outlaws would not be expected back again that night—he resolved to hurry back and put his friends on their guard; but, just as he was about to start, his attention was arrested by the appearance of four persons in the outlaws' camp.

Three of them were Indians, hideously painted and bedecked with feathers and bear-claws, while the fourth was a whiteman and a captive. The latter was well advanced in years, though with a firm step and well-preserved physique. He had a full, iron-gray beard, and a clear-cut and intellectual face which at once fixed the attention of Mahomet so closely that he forgot all else. And as he continued to gaze at the old captive, the scout's eyes fairly protruded from their sockets, and finally he started back as if from a suddenly discovered danger, mentally exclaiming:

"It's him, sure's there's a God in Heaven! Oh, my blessed Redeemer! can it be that she—the Protégée— But, bah! what an ole lallyshacker I be! Come, Mahomet, cool down, and if you've no objection to kickin' an old fool, step back a ways and let yourself have it heel and toe."

The old fellow's self-lecturing was here interrupted by a burst of excitement in the camp. Bishop Darral seemed to have been thrown into violent rage about something or other, and it was several minutes before the "pillar" cooled down.

A delay of half an hour was occasioned by the coming of the Indians with the old captive; but finally the band departed for Pilgrims' Bar, leaving the prisoner lashed to a tree and in custody of two Indians and three of Darral's men.

Despite the danger that he knew menaced Pilgrims' Bar, Mahomet lingered by the outlaw camp. Something in the presence of the old captive held him spellbound, and forced upon him a sense of duty, and that was the rescue of the old man.

But, what could he do against such odds and some of them ferocious savages?

He had scarcely asked himself the question when he saw a tongue of flame shoot from the darkness on the opposite side of the camp, the crash of a rifle tore through the woods and was mingled with the death-cry of one of the Indians. Then, from the darkness whence had leaped that flame glided a man, and with an uplifted club rushed upon the foe like a whirlwind of death!

It was Silent Saul, the Young Patrol, and the instant Old Mahomet recognized the youth, he, too, dashed from his concealment with a whoop, and for a few moments the echoes of that pifion forest and the impinging foot-hills, gave multiplied voices to the din of battle.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RESULT OF THE CONFLICT.

THE three Mormons and their two red-skin friends left to guard the old captive, were seated before the camp-fire in conversation, never dreaming of possible danger until startled by the crack of Silent Saul's rifle. Even then the first thought was of flight, for they felt assured they had been attacked by a superior number of foes; but before they could get upon their feet and under way, the Young Patrol was upon them, dealing deadly blows; while, from the opposite side of the camp dashed Old Mahomet, yelling like a wild Indian, and brandishing a revolver around his head.

But a great noise was all the old man was able to contribute to the conflict, for by the time he had reached Silent Saul's side it was ended, and five men lay motionless on the earth, two of them dead and the others with broken

heads. As he glanced around him, his revolver drawn for a shot, and saw no enemy to engage, he raised his eyes to Saul's face and burst into a well-feigned passion.

"Blankety-blank!—blank!—blank!" he exclaimed, "Silent Saul, you're an improved Jersey swine! I'm out and around, and come for a share in this thundergust, but you've *deestroyed* all the 'vailable thunder and left me the gust. But then you're a lallycooler, anyhow, Saul—the idol of my tumultuous ole heart!"

"Men, for God's sake cut my bonds!" It was the old captive that made this appeal.

Mahomet drew his knife and severed the man's bonds, saying, as he did so:

"They had you foul; didn't they, stranger?—there you are."

"Thank you, thank you!" exclaimed the old man, gratefully, as he stepped forward to greet his rescuers.

"Stranger," said Mahomet, "there's nothin' mean-lookin' 'bout you, but you must have been up to mischief or else you'd not been here in bonds."

"Friends, I am being persecuted to death in the name of the Mormon Church!"

"Mormon curse!" exclaimed Mahomet, averting the keen, searching glances of the old man; "it's the rankest, bubblin' hellbroth that ever scorched the soul of man or woman! But say, pard, what might your name be?"

"John Custer."

"What! the father of the celestial angel, Miss Numa?"

"Yes," eagerly answered the old man; "what do you know of her and Tom?—my children?"

"We know nothin' of Tom, but we've got the gal cooped up safe as you please."

"Thank God for that!" cried the old man.

"But she thinks her father's dead."

"No doubt of it, poor child! She has been led to that conclusion—that belief, through the schemes of the vile wretch who is still persecuting her. But, my good friends, isn't it dangerous to tarry here? The sound of your fire-arms will bring back that pack of devils upon us!"

"Yes, yes! you're right," assented Mahomet; "we'd better be out and around, but here's some fine-looking rifles, and some fixed ammunition we'd as well take along."

The three men appropriated the arms of the dead and wounded foe, and then Mahomet led the way into the shadows of the woods, John Custer following, and Silent Saul, as was supposed, bringing up the rear. But, glancing back just as he was entering the deeper shadows, Mahomet saw the Young Patrol bend over one of the outlaws and whip a knife across his throat, then rise and with nimble footsteps hurry on after them!

The escape of the three was not made a moment too soon, for the form of Silent Saul had scarcely been swallowed up by the darkness when Revenue Bill, Bishop Darral and their followers came rushing into camp like a herd of stampeded sheep.

As John Custer had predicted, the sound of Saul's fire-arms and the din of battle had brought them back.

Revenue Bill was furious with rage at sight of his prostrate friends, but it was only in a mild form compared with that of Bishop Darral when he discovered that John Custer had escaped!

"Whose hellish work is this?" the good "pillar" exclaimed, as he glared around him with blazing eyes.

One of the Mormons, who had been knocked senseless with Silent Saul's club, raised himself on his hands and looked around him in a confused sort of a way.

"Good Lord!" cried one of the outlaws, "see! his throat is cut!"

"Toltec Jim, what's happened? who did this murderous work?" questioned the Bishop.

"Toltec" Jim sunk back upon the ground faint with the loss of blood.

Of the five men left in charge of the captive, three were found dead. Across the throats of two of them—one of the dead, and Toltec Jim—a knife had been drawn, cutting merely deep enough to draw blood.

"What does that slash on those men's throats mean, Bishop?" Revenue Bill inquired.

"I don't understand it," replied the Bishop.

"Bishop," spoke up the treacherous miner, Jackal, "do you remember the red scar on Silent Saul's throat? Isn't that enough to convince you that the Young Patrol has been here in the flesh and the spirit of vengeance? I tell you he is a Nemesis, and God only knows how many of us are marked for his silent vengeance!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MAHOMET DESTROYS A "SNAKE-DEN."

It was broad daylight when Silent Saul and Mahomet reached Pilgrims' Bar with John Custer, and relieved the miners of a great fear and suspense.

Already Mayor Bloom had conducted Numa from her hiding-place up the gulch back to his cabin, and there her father was taken.

At sight of him a shriek burst from the maiden's lips, for his coming, without previous notice, was like the coming of one from the grave.

"Oh, my father!" burst from her lips, and then, in her endeavors to embrace him, she fell fainting in his arms!

"Numa, my poor child!" the old man murmured, as he held her in his arms, his form convulsed with inward emotion, the tears trickling down his bearded face.

The spectators witnessed the meeting with sad and solemn mien. Mahomet's brows contracted, he bit his nether lip as if to restrain an outburst of inward emotion, and finally, with a deep-drawn sigh that seemed born of bitter anguish, he tore himself from the cabin, and, hastening to the saloon, called for two or three glasses of liquor, which he drank with a grim sort of satisfaction.

In a little while Numa recovered from her swoon, and her first remark was:

"Father, we have mourned you as dead!"

"So I have learned, Numa."

"Where have you been, father?"

"I have been a prisoner. I was taken by masked men the day I left home—men claiming to be outlaws, who had me confined in a cavern—where, I knew not. They told me I was to be held for a ransom. Night before last I was liberated by a woman—the junior wife of Bishop Darral. It was that woman who told me that you and Tom mourned me as dead, and that you had sold off the property to Darral, determined to flee the country—that Darral had got your deeds of conveyance into his possession, and then insisted on paying for the same by applying an old note, purporting to have been given by me, on the purchase. Or, that on condition of your marrying him, he would give up the note and half the value of your property in cash. This was what aroused the Spanish blood of the woman. She was determined no other should succeed her as Darral's wife, as she had succeeded two others. Seeing Darral was determined upon marrying you, she effected my release in hopes of thwarting her husband's wicked designs. She gave me a horse and bade me god-speed after you and Tom, who, she informed me, had fled the night before. When I thought I was free of all dangers, I was captured by three Indians, friends of Darral, and taken to his camp; but, thanks to heroic Silent Saul, and fearless Old Mahomet, I was rescued. But, Tom, they tell me, has not been heard of since you and he parted."

"Nothing, father," answered Numa, "and I am afraid, the dear, good boy has been killed. But, oh, father! you do not know what I owe to Silent Saul and these brave, kind-hearted miners!"

"God bless them, is my prayer!" said the old man, fervently.

Numa assisted Bloom in preparing breakfast for her father and his rescuers, and when it was ready Mahomet was sent for; but he declined to come, giving as an excuse that he had already breakfasted at the "Soup Shop."

Half an hour or so later word came to the mayor's cabin that the outlaws and Indians were advancing upon the camp; but, happily, it proved to be a false alarm, growing out of the discovery of two Indian scouts lurking among the hills. That it was merely a question of time until an attack would be made, no one had a doubt, and so, double guards were posted, and every man kept under arms.

The day wore slowly away, and about noon the quiet and suspense of the camp was broken by the arrival of a heavy freight-wagon drawn by six mules. It was loaded with supplies for Pilgrims' Bar, and accompanied by six men. Two of the six were the freighters, themselves, but the other four were men who had engaged passage to Pilgrims' Bar, as this was the only means of conveyance to the place.

Of the four passengers two were gold-seekers, the third was a middle-aged man recently from the States, judging by his dress, while the fourth was a man whom everybody declared, on sight, was a sport—one of those neatly-dressed, soft-handed fellows who made gambling a regular business. He was a young man of perhaps thirty years of age, dressed in an immaculate suit of black corduroy, his feet incased in

patent-leather boots, and his head surmounted by a gold-banded, white felt hat. He introduced himself as Jack Baldwin, and if there had been any doubt as to his character before, it was now entirely removed, for the fame of Jack Baldwin, or rather "Poker Jack" had long preceded him to Pilgrims' Bar.

The man in citizen's dress Jack introduced as his "tenderfoot" friend, David Force, from the East, out on a sight-seeing visit among the hills; but no one doubted but that he was a card-sharp also.

The four new-comers took lodgings at the boarding-house, the freighters stopping with their friend Swanzy.

A barrel of whisky was among the supplies brought to camp. Pilgrims' Bar had run short in flour and bacon, but the only thing in which the miners had feared a famine was liquor. That fear was now removed.

Everybody that could get a hand on the barrel helped to unload it from the wagon. It was then rolled to the door of the saloon, and was about to be taken inside when Old Mahomet stopped the men and turning to Swanzy asked:

"Swanzy, how much clear profit do you consider there's in that snake-den?"

"Why, do you think you can drink the hull o' it?" replied the proprietor of the City Hall, somewhat surprised by the Old Puzzle's question.

"No," returned Mahomet, "but honest-bright, how much clear profit's in that barrel?"

"Wal," said Swanzy, making a mental calculation, "the cost is 'bout one hundred dollars, and I aim to make over and about that, two hundred, or nighly that."

"Here," said Mahomet, taking a well-filled buckskin bag from his capacious shirt-bosom and handing it to Swanzy, "weigh out the dust—take good weight—and I'll take the hull bar'l o' 'snake-wake.'"

Mechanically Swanzy took the bag, his eyes fixed on Mahomet with a puzzled look.

"It's all right," said the old man; "weigh out your dust—the liquor's mine!"

Swanzy and Mahomet turned and went into the saloon together.

"Wal, I do swar!" declared a miner; "I reckon Old Puzzle's goin' to knock out the head o' the bar'l and set 'em up to the hull camp on the strength o' that gal. Oh, what a roarin' drunk thar 'll be!"

"But whar the de'il does he git all his dust?" put in another. "He's alers lousy 'ith it."

"Hasn't that question been axed a hundred times before?" the first speaker retorted. "Hasn't he been a mysterious ole cuss ever since he come here?—past findin' out?"

Mahomet soon returned with an ax, with which he deliberately proceeded to knock in the end of the barrel. A few stout blows and the work was done, and the amber liquid revealed to the eyes of the thirsty, astounded crowd.

The miners began edging up closer like so many swine eager to get at the trough.

"Stand back, boys," Mahomet said, as he dropped the ax and seized the barrel by the chine. "I'm goin' to treat ole mother earth."

And as he concluded, he tipped the barrel over, and before a man could speak or arrest his movement, every drop of liquor was spilled on the ground.

A genuine cry of dismay escaped the lips of the miners, and this was followed by loud curses and abusive epithets. For awhile it seemed the old man was in danger of his life, but he stood his ground fearlessly, defiantly; and when the confusion had subsided, he said:

"Men, don't make fools o' yourselves, but listen. Up the gulch are four graves—the graves of good men, when sober, that died with their boots on. Every grave represents the arrival o' a new bar'l o' liquor in this camp. Every 'rival was follered by general drunk, and fightin' 'mongst us. This would be no exception. Could we afford it? Think! up at the may'r's cabin yonder is as sweet a little dove as cooed the heart of man into gentle love. Over yonder and 'round us, as you all know, are hoverin' bands o' slimy-necked vultures ready to destroy her! Men, we need clear brains and steady nerves to defend her as we have sworn to do. Liquor shall not rob her of that defense, and that's why I give that hellbroth to mother earth!"

For a moment a deep silence followed this speech. There were few, if any, but who felt the force of his remarks, not only as a well-merited rebuke, but as a serious and solemn fact. A murmur of approval passed over the crowd and finally ended in a deafening shout of applause.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAHOMET TAKES A HAND AT POKER.

THE miners of Pilgrims' Bar were like all other miners in one respect, at least; they were addicted to gambling among themselves, and never hesitated to entertain a stranger whenever one happened along.

As every man in the camp considered himself something of an expert, "Poker" Jack Baldwin had no difficulty in getting a game started, and in less than three hours after his arrival in camp he had fleeced at least a dozen men out of all the dust they possessed and all they could borrow.

Baldwin was a quiet, genteel gambler. The moment he began to play his handsome face took on a mild, pleasant expression which, no matter how the game was going, was maintained throughout. There was no chance for his opponent to judge by the expression of his face, the value of his cards.

Not a miner complained of his ill-fortune, or dared to find any fault with Jack's success.

At the time the playing began Old Mahomet was absent, but he finally came swinging in whistling "Captain Kidd" in such a merry, sprightly way that Poker Jack, looking up, was induced to remark:

"The old man's a little mellow, isn't he, if he did spill all the poison?"

"Stranger," replied Mahomet, who overheard the observation of the sport, "I'm out and around, full of joy and happiness—the pure stuff made outen a clear conscience and sunny disposition. I'm feelin' so gracious and philanthropic that I'd as soon as not contribute a few ounces to your purse—providin' the keerds you hold says so. Yes, stranger, I'm out and around, I am."

"Be seated, my genial friend," said the gambler, with a bland "will-you-walk-into-my-parlor" smile, "and I will be pleased to amuse you, at least."

Mahomet dropped himself into a chair opposite Baldwin with the air of a veteran, tipped back his battered tile and was ready for work.

The deal fell to Baldwin. Mahomet planked down a bag of dust on the table, again causing the miners to stare in amazement.

The betting at once began in a spirited way on both sides. Old Mahomet seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of dust, and promptly met the advances of the sport who finally "called" Mahomet on a pair of aces and jacks. Mahomet won the stakes on four kings.

A murmur of surprise ran through the crowd of spectators.

Baldwin was unmoved by his loss and went on dealing for a second game.

Mahomet "raked the pot" to one side of the table, and then started the new game with the five golden eagles won from the sport.

Baldwin drew a well-filled purse from his pocket, poured the contents on the table at his right, and again the betting began more spirited and determined than before.

And all the while Old Mahomet kept softly whistling his favorite, "Captain Kidd," while the handsome gambler maintained his pleasant smile.

The betting continued until it finally became evident that Poker Jack was nearing the bottom of his pile, while the Lord only knew how much more dust, besides that in sight, the redoubtable Old Puzzle had stored away about his person.

A direful suspense took possession of the astounded crowd of miners gathered around the players. A deep and almost painful silence, broken only by Mahomet's whistle, ensued. The players were calm, cool and deliberate, though Baldwin's smile was not quite so bland, nor Mahomet's whistling near so musical.

But as there must be an end to all things, it was even so with that game, and the end was greeted with an explosion of lungs that fairly shook the building. Old Mahomet won the game on a bluff, he having no two cards alike in his hands.

Poker Jack accepted his defeat with quiet indifference, and as he arose from the table, he said:

"Folks, for the first time in years, I'm about broke. Old Mahomet's a veteran card-sharp. I'd give five hundred dollars, if I had it, for that whistle of his, for it's more deceptive and delusive than the voice of a siren."

Mahomet gathered up his treasure, stuffed it into his capacious pockets, and with a polite bow left the saloon trilling his familiar air with spirit anew.

"Gentlemen," said Poker Jack, as the old man disappeared from the room, "that man's a singed cat. I'll bet this chronometer about all

of value he left me, that he's an old schemer, deep and shrewd, and will wake up Pilgrims' Bar some of these fine mornings in a way that'll make Rome howl!"

CHAPTER XV.

MAHOMET SEEKS A WATERY GRAVE.

SILENT SAUL took no interest in what was going on at the saloon, but like a wary eagle he kept unceasing watch over the camp. He could not trust the safety of the place entirely to the men on guard.

An hour or two before sunset he started off up the river to make his usual rounds of the wooded hills where enemies were likely to be hovering. He kept on the west side of the stream, and when he had made half the distance to the Devil's Stew-Kettle, he concluded to go on and take a peep at the whirlpool. He could not forget the strange mystery that to him hung over the place. He had hopes of a sight in daylight of the Genii that had delivered him from death.

As he moved along a voice hailed him. Looking around he saw two men approaching. One of them was Jack Baldwin, the gambler, and the other his friend, Davy Force.

Quickly Silent Saul dropped his rifle into the hollow of his left arm as a measure of precaution. Baldwin read in the movement the Patrol's thoughts, and throwing up his open hands advanced fearlessly toward him.

A few words passed between them, Saul, of course, using his tablet. Their conversation was finally interrupted by the sound of excited voices. It came from the direction of the Stew-Kettle, whose sullen roar they could also hear.

Silent Saul instantly became all alertness, and stealthily as a cat he began moving in the direction of the voices, the gambler and his friend following.

They finally gained a point behind a rock from where they could command the view of an exciting spectacle. On the very edge of the whirlpool, holding a large stone in his two hands, his back to the river, stood Old Mahomet, while confronting him, and about fifteen feet away stood four masked men with drawn revolvers.

The five were not over ten paces away, and every word spoken could be distinctly heard by the men behind the rock.

"Gents," Mahomet was heard to say in reply to some remark, "you're off your base, and you'll find that I'm out and around."

"You can't bluff game us, ole man," one of the masked men was heard to reply. "You've had your share o' gold outen these hills w'ot God's consecrated to the Mormon Church, besides the cool thousand you cleaned Poker Jack out of. Now, we want the rest, and you can save yerself oceans o' trouble by jist namin' the spot whar your secret pocket are you've been workin'."

On hearing these words Silent Saul flashed a suspicious look upon Poker Jack and his friend. Baldwin quickly read the thought in the youth's mind and said, in a whisper:

"That's thundering queer, sir, that them fellows should know already that I lost heavily in cards with Mahomet. There's a spy in Pilgrims' Bar, if them four fellows are not Barites themselves. You may confound our presence here with that of them masked men, and their purpose, but I assure you I know nothing about them and am ready to prove it—but hark! listen to Mahomet!"

"You infernal scoundrels!" the Old Puzzle was heard to exclaim with indignation, "you take me for a spring lamb, but don't forget to keep out of my reach for I'm a bad man—I'm out and around. I've no secret 'pocket' to locate to you, and if I had do you think I'd tell you?"

"Mahomet, you can't bluff us like you did that sport," declared one of the masked men, betraying some impatience; "we have watched and waited for this opportunity to catch you out for some time, and you'd as well unlimber your tongue and take us into partnership in workin' your claim."

"I don't perceive as I want any sich pards," retorted Mahomet, "as you clout-faced bush-rangers. I've no fears, nor no use for sich sneakin' critters. I'm out and around, gents."

"Old man, we'll fetch the secret we want," threatened one of the maskers, "if we have to apply a slow fire. Men, take him!"

Together the four made a rush upon the old man. Quickly Mahomet raised the stone in his hands above his head as if to hurl it at the foe. As he did so he sprang backward, lost his balance and fell into the whirlpool. Feet downward, he sunk from view like a stone in the boiling flood.

With an oath of baffled rage the four villains rushed to the brink of the great pool ready to seize the old man the moment he should rise to the surface.

This was Silent Saul's time to act, and quick as thought he raised his rifle and fired.

With a yell one of the outlaws leaped forward and fell into the whirlpool dead.

As the Young Patrol's gun rung out, Jack Baldwin and his friend sprang from behind the rock, each with a pair of black-mouthed deringers in hand, and opened fire on the other three. The latter stood their ground and returned the fire, and several shots were quickly exchanged.

David Force fell dead at his friend's side, but never flinching, the plucky sport drew a revolver and popped away. Once, during the brief and deadly contest, Silent Saul was sure he heard a bullet strike the gambler, but as he never moved out of his tracks until the last outlaw had fallen, the Young Patrol concluded he was mistaken, and ran to the edge of the whirlpool in hopes of being in time to aid his old friend.

But nothing of the old man, save his battered tile whirling and tossing on the boiling, swirling waters, could be seen. He stood for a minute—for two minutes, never once taking his eyes from the angry pool, but no sight of his friend rewarded his eager gaze.

With a look of intense pain upon his face Saul finally turned away from the pool. He saw Jack Baldwin kneeling by his friend, and advanced to his side.

"Poor Davy!" Jack sighed, in a husky voice, "he's done for; but what of the old man—Mahomet?"

"He's found a watery grave," Saul wrote upon his tablet, but in his heart there was cherished a burning hope that the mysterious Genii who had saved his life, would also save the old man's.

"Well, Silent Saul, I've got a hole shot in me," Jack Baldwin said, his face growing deathly pale and his voice weak; "help me back to camp, Saul, please."

Blood was beginning to show through his clothing in the region of the right breast, and Saul knew he must soon succumb; so taking the brave and plucky sport's arm within his own, he started with him to camp.

CHAPTER XVI.

SOME STARTLING REVELATIONS.

THE news of Old Mahomet's death and that of David Force, and the wounding of Jack Baldwin threw the deepest gloom over the spirits of Pilgrims' Bar.

Men were sent out to bring in the body of Force, while the gambler's wound was examined and carefully dressed. His injuries were not as bad as had been at first supposed, but he became quite weak with suffering and loss of blood.

The sport had been taken to a miner's cabin where he was made as comfortable as possible.

Night by this time had set in. Double guards were posted at all the approaches to the camp, while Silent Saul continued on duty with tireless energy.

The miners went armed, ready for an attack at any moment, for they did not believe the night would pass without bloodshed.

Mayor Bloom, Marshal Hazen, and a few others gathered at the saloon to discuss the situation. Old Mahomet's death seemed to distress the mayor most.

"The poor ole galoat," he said, sorrowfully, "it cuts like a knife to think he's gone. But one thing is sartain: there's been more'n one traitor in our midst in easy communication with the outlaws, else how could them four scoundrels have known 'bout 'Homot cleanin' out Poker Jack so soon after the job was did?"

"Yes," replied Hazen, "and 'less we weed out these traitors with cold lead I'm afraid we'll all be taken in yit. It begins to look as if that gal's comin' war bringin' us bad luck instead of good fortune."

"It's lookin' that way, sure," affirmed Bloom, "but we'll stay by her till the last breath, as we've sworn to do. It's too bad the sport got hurt, for he must 'n' been a holy swizzer on a fight. But, boys, that reminds me that I war to escort the gal and her dad to call on Jack, and I must be about it. I think the sight o' her pretty face and sweet voice will be a balm to the plucky feller's wounds and spirit."

So saying, Bloom left the saloon, and shortly afterward he conducted Numa and her father into the presence of Jack Baldwin and introduced them.

Jack was reclining on a bunk quite weak and

still suffering much pain, but as Bloom had predicted, the presence of the maiden and her gentle sympathetic voice seemed to soothe his pains and strengthen his body.

They remained half an hour and then, after expressing a kind hope for his speedy recovery, they returned to their own quarters.

Bloom remained with Baldwin, and as soon as the visitors were gone he asked:

"What did ye think o' the Protégée o' Pilgrims' Bar, Jack?"

"She's an angel, Mr. Bloom," declared the wounded sport; "I don't blame you folks for fighting like Trojans for her. But I believe you said her father's name was John Custer?"

"Yes, John Custer."

"Too bad, too bad on her account," said Baldwin, half to himself.

"Why too bad, Jack?" interrogated Bloom; "what's wrong 'ith him?"

"Mayor," said Baldwin, "I didn't mean to say what I did, but since I did, all goes. Years ago, during the great Civil War, a man named Daniel Kirk was mysteriously murdered in Kentonville Kentucky. A man named Worth was indicted upon strongest evidence for the crime, and I was in jail awaiting his trial when a band of Confederate guerrillas swept down upon the town, and because Union sentiments were strong in that place, killed, destroyed and burned everybody nearly and everything. The town was laid in ashes, and of course the jail went with it. What became of the prisoners nobody knew, but they were supposed to have perished."

"Nearly all of the old settlers and even their families disappeared during the war. The marching and counter-marching of first one army and then the other almost desolated the land; so that when the war ended, and a very few of the fugitives returned to their old homes they found them not, neither were their neighbors to be found or even heard of. In the course of a few years a few men, or their families returned; but the most of them never. The murder of Daniel Kirk was almost forgotten; but a few months ago, the Governor of Kentucky received a letter from Salt Lake City informing him that Worth, the murderer of Kirk, was alive and living in Southern Utah near Beaver City, under the name of John Custer. The letter also informed him that the main witness, one Lafolette, was also living in the same vicinity under an assumed name."

"The governor at once had a warrant sworn out for Worth's arrest, and dispatched an officer with it to the West. I have that warrant in my pocket!"

"You the warrant?" exclaimed Bloom; "what the deuce are you doin' with the warrant?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" softly laughed the wounded man; "mayor, I don't want any trouble with you folks, for you are a choice lot of brave fellows, and since I'm on my back, and your guest, I'm going to tell you all, though it's not exactly business like. As a gambler I've been a very fair success, except at Pilgrims' Bar, and made quite a reputation assuch. But the fact is gambling is only a cloak to hide my real character. I am a detective!"

"Thunder and fire!" exclaimed Bloom incredulously, "you're pokin' fun at Pilgrims' Bar, Jack."

"No, I am not. Did you ever hear of Jack Strickland, mayor?"

"The detective?"

"Yes."

"A thousand times!" declared Bloom, "and he's a detective that is a detective."

"Well, I am Jack Strickland. David Force, the Kentucky officer, placed the warrant in my hands, and John Custer's my man. And another thing, Mayor Bloom, that lovely girl, Numa, is not John Custer's child!"

"You may be Jack Strickland, stranger," came a voice through the partially open door from the darkness without—a voice that caused the mayor and gambler to start, "but as sure as you undertake to carry off the dad o' the Protégée of Pilgrims' Bar, you'll be criss-crossed with bullet-holes till yer blessed Redeemer won't know you! Gentlemen, I'm out and around!"

And as the voice ceased speaking the door was pushed open and Old Mahomet stepped into the room, his head bare, his thumbs in his armpits, and a bland smile upon his bearded homely face.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TEXAS "TARRANTLER."

THE return of Old Mahomet was like the return of one from the grave, and there was great rejoicing throughout the camp.

The Old Puzzle said that he had been boiled up like sediments from the bottom of the whirlpool, and chucked in under the projecting bank, his head just above water, but concealed from those on shore. There he had remained until after dark, not knowing how matters had ended on shore. His story seemed plausible enough, and was accepted as such.

The night wore away without any further incident, much to the happy surprise of the miners.

The fact of Jack Strickland having a warrant for Custer's arrest was kept a secret, Old Mahomet having obtained a promise from the detective not to serve the warrant until the danger hanging over the camp had passed away.

Silent Saul was absent yet when day dawned, nor did he return as the hours wore on. Naturally enough the miners became uneasy about him.

Patiently the return of the Young Mountain Patrol was awaited. The camp was lifeless and quiet with dire suspense; but about ten o'clock a little commotion was excited by the appearance of two strangers claiming to be gold-seekers. They were heavily armed, and looked upon with suspicion, as most any stranger would have been at that time; but as they gave a good account of themselves and were quiet fellows, they were hospitably received. But a few hours later when a party of seven other strangers appeared, telling the same story as the others, and far more suspicious-looking, the camp became alarmed. The miners mistrusted that their enemies were endeavoring to gain admittance to camp in the guise of friendly strangers, watch their opportunity and strike when least expected.

Had Mayor Bloom been equal to the occasion, he would have disarmed the strangers, if not expelled them from camp. He was a good, brave man, but wanting in executive ability and that firmness of mind to act promptly and at the right time; and so the new-comers were soon enjoying the freedom of the camp, and one of them, calling himself Old Spider, the Texas Tarrantler, making himself quite obnoxious.

The "Tarrantler" was a man of forty, heavy-set, with a big bullet-head set upon a massive neck. He was a man of undoubted great physical strength, and coarse, brutal instincts, who took the first opportunity to boast of his conquests in knock-down-and-drag-out fights in other camps.

Fortunately every drop of liquor in the saloon had been dispensed that day, so that when Old Spider called for the drinks for himself, and was informed that none was to be had, Swanzy realized that it was a good thing for the Bar that he was out of the stuff.

Spider, however, was inclined not to believe Swanzy, or else made his pretended disbelief a pretext for raising a row, and opened up on the camp and its poverty in a high-handed way. But while he was giving free expression to his feelings, the attention of the crowd was drawn to still another new-comer, and who, of all the strangers, filled the miners' breasts with most fear. He was an Indian chief—a tall, athletic fellow with a queerly-painted face and heavily-plumed head. His muddy-colored hair hung in a short, heavy braid at the back of his neck. He was dressed in an odd and peculiar Indian garb, neat-fitting and clean. He was a fine specimen of the American Indian, and what was the most remarkable about him were his eyes. They were large, intelligent, and of a dark blue color, and fairly glowing in their keenness. At his girdle he carried a tomahawk and a long-bladed hunting-knife.

There was not a man present who had ever seen the Indian before, or knew who he was.

"Great Geronimo! and Gen'l Jackson!" burst from the lips of Old Spider at sight of the state-ly chief, "what high and mighty big Injin have we here, anyhow?"

"I am Thunder Voice!" replied the chief, flashing a look of scorn upon the bully.

"Oh, my, my! whoopee!" exclaimed Spider, sarcastically, "how are you, Thunder Voice, old pard? I am glad—Oh! so you refuse to shake hands with Old Spider, the Texas Tarrantler, eh? Wal, I'll be eternally rapzoooped if that don't take the puddin', pot and all. An Injin refuse to shake hands with me! It's far more than I can stand!"

In his assumed rage the bully reached out, and, seizing the chief by the ear, was about to walk him out of the room, when there was a sudden flash of the Indian's arm, the sound of a dull blow, and Old Spider lay stretched upon the floor half-dazed, the blood streaming from a flattened nose.

In bewilderment the Texas Tarrantler arose

to his feet, and wiping the blood from his face, muttered:

"No Injin that ever breathed can strike me and live! Injin, prepare to die, for I'm goin' to rip your soul right outen your infernal carcass!"

Swanzy and others pleaded for peace, but Old Spider was inexorable. He would listen to no one. He was determined to have the life of the chief, and throwing off his coat, he drew a murderous-looking knife from his boot-leg and turned upon Thunder Voice.

But the latter was prepared for him, and as the bully, blind with furious rage, rushed upon him, he raised his hand, in which he held a long, slender-bladed knife, by the point—his arm swept forward, there was a flash of the flying steel, a gurgling cry burst from Spider's lips—he stopped short—reeled backward, clutching at his throat into which was driven to the guard Thunder Voice's knife!

"Help! help!" gasped the doomed desperado, as the blood bubbled from his tightly-drawn lips, his eyes glaring with death-agony.

A miner sprung forward and drew the knife from the man's throat, and as he did so there was a violent convulsion of the body and the Texas Tarrantler fell dead.

In terror the crowd recoiled from the reach of Thunder Voice, who stood, tomahawk in hand, his blazing eyes taking in the movements of every man in the room.

A dead silence followed. It was broken by the entrance of Joshua Bloom, who, at sight of the Indian, his attitude of defense, and the lifeless body on the floor, was told plainer than words that Pilgrims' Bar had been the scene of another bloody tragedy.

"Look out for the Injin's hatchet, may'r!" yelled a miner, as Thunder Voice turned toward Bloom.

But the chief seemed to have recognized a friend in the mayor, and with a change of demeanor he advanced to Bloom and said, in a low tone:

"Thunder Voice would speak in a whisper to the white chief of this camp."

There was a magnetism in the wonderful eyes of the Indian that sent a strange thrill through the mayor's form, and as the red-skin turned and left the room he turned also, and followed him out.

Outside the saloon, beyond hearing of all others, the chief stopped and in a subdued voice said:

"Let the white chief of Pilgrims' Bar be on his guard if he would save the white maiden. Dangers hang over the camp. When it comes it will be a whirlwind of death. Thunder Voice will be near. But let all your friends wear a bandage around his left arm, and by this you can be known from your enemies by Thunder Voice. Fail not in this, and make sure now but your friends wear the badge. Again I say, be on your guard! The storm will come sooner or later, and the camp will run red with blood. Thunder Voice has spoken, and will now go back to the hills."

And so saying he turned and left the camp.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE "PROTÉGÉE" ACCUSED OF HORSE-STEALING.

MAYOR BLOOM stood and gazed after the receding figure of the Indian like one in a trance. He was completely astounded. He had never seen the red-skin before, nor ever heard of such a chief as Thunder Voice; and yet there was something so mysteriously familiar about the fellow that it seemed he must have seen him before, in a dream, at least.

Seeing Old Mahomet emerge from the saloon, he advanced to meet him, and at once communicated to him the Indian's words of warning.

After Mahomet had heard the mayor's story, he asked:

"What did you think 'bout that Injin, anyhow?"

"He's no more Injin than you be!" declared Bloom, "but who he really is, what he is, and what he means to do, I don't know. I wish the critter'd throwed more light on hisself and his words. But then he's a mystery. Didn't he knock the trotters from under the Texas Tarrantler in fine shape?"

"I should say so, and he done the knife-act neat as I could 'a' did it," observed Mahomet; "but, may'r, there comes two more visitors up the pass."

"Yes, and by Joe," exclaimed Bloom, at sight of the two men who were riding slowly up the gulch, "that one with the big hat on's Sheriff Poole o' Beaver City!"

And so it proved to be. The sheriff was well known to the miners, he having been there twice before looking for horse-thieves. He was a big-hearted and pleasant man, and left a favorable impression on the camp when there last.

Mayor Bloom awaited his approach and greeted him warmly.

"You can't help driftin' round to Pilgrims' Bar once in a while," observed the mayor.

"Yes, but I'd rather not have come this time, mayor," the sheriff replied.

"Why not?"

"My business here's very unpleasant; besides, you have had so much shooting and killing going on 'round here of late that a fellow can't feel entirely safe. But the fact of it is I have warrants for the arrest of one Silent Saul for the attempted murder of Bishop Darral, and—"

"Saul's not here, sheriff," interrupted Old Mahomet, "nor has he been since the fore part o' last night. We're afraid somethin' has happened him—that the Bishop's folks, or his associates, Revenue Bill and band, have killed him."

"An hour or so before daylight this morning," the officer said, "Silent Saul crept unobserved into Darral's tent and attempted to cut his throat. He came so near killing the Bishop, in fact, that he cut a gash across his weazen from ear to ear, but for some reason or other it was only skin deep. The sting of the keen blade awoke the Bishop, and the assassin fled before he could finish his bloody work, but, as he went out of the tent, he looked back over his shoulder like a guilty wretch and Darral recognized him. I tell you, men, he must possess the heart of a devil."

"He can't hold a candle to Bishop Darral!" declared Old Mahomet.

"Don't you think he has some deep-seated grudge against the Mormon?" asked the mayor.

"That may be," answered Poole; "men with infirmities like his are naturally nervous and excitable—in other words, cranky—always imagining he has enemies. But still, that don't justify murder."

"Sheriff, do you think the Bishop's a saint?" Mahomet asked.

The sheriff smiled.

"Well, not exactly; but he's a good Mormon, strong in the faith, and a man of great influence in Southern Utah."

"He's a double-dyed, fulminatin' old devil!" Mahomet declared with blazing eyes; "he fu'st attempted to murder Silent Saul, and since then one of our men has been killed and another wounded by that very Bishop Dar—Demon! He's now in caboots with Revenue Bill—they're campin' in the same ring and workin' together as docile as Eng and Chang. Oh! I tell you, the greatest blunder of Silent Saul's life was in not rippin' the cold steel right into his innards deep and often. That's what I think 'bout it, and if any critter takes exception to my sentiments he'll find me—out and around."

"Men, I didn't come here to pick a quarrel, but to do my sworn duty as an officer of the law," said the sheriff.

"Oh, sartainly, sheriff! I don't hold no grudge 'ginst you; but it does seem as if some one'd bring the law to bear on Darral, he'd swing so durned high the blue-bottles'd never find him. But look here, sheriff; you said, didn't you, that you'd warrants for more'n Silent Saul?"

"Yes," replied the officer, "I also have warrants for the arrest of Tom Custer, and his sister, Numa—now a guest in your camp—for the crime of horse-stealing!"

CHAPTER XIX.

BISHOP DARRAL IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

MAYOR BLOOM and Old Mahomet were loth to believe the sheriff's charge against Numa Custer; but upon reflection they saw in the whole affair the work of the villain, Darral—that in failing to obtain possession of the girl by brute force, even aided and abetted by the outlaws, he had invoked the law, knowing he could command the entire legal power of the Territory to aid him in his designs.

"Sheriff," the mayor finally said, "as to young Custer we know nothing, but the gal's here, but you can't take her!"

"Never!" added Mahomet, "without you walk over the bodies of as brave men as ever pulled a trigger!"

"Gentlemen," said the sheriff sternly, "it's the law now, and not Darral you threaten to obstruct. That boy and girl stole a pair of horses from Darral and endeavored to run them

out of the country. Warrants were sworn out for their arrest and placed in my hands, and that's why I'm here."

"Sheriff, go back and tell Darral we defy the warrants, him, the devil and Tom Walker," declared Mahomet.

"But remember, men," persisted the sheriff calmly, "that I can command the power of the whole Territory, and if Darral insists on the warrants being served, I will bring a force to do so. It will be my duty."

"We understand that, sheriff," replied Mahomet, "and we'll be in shape to stand by our colors. But I think this matter can be settled. At any rate, you go back and tell Darral that I'll settle for them horses—pay double value and all expenses if he'll recall the warrants. And furthermore, if the Bishop'll come here with you alone, I'll wager my scalp that he'll be treated fairly—he given an opportunity to make a statement as to his grievances, in spite of the dirty things he has already done, and if he can't be dissuaded from havin' that gal arrested by fair and honest means, then I'll say no more, but help you serve the warrants."

"That's sayin' a good deal, 'Homet," observed Bloom, with a disapproving shake of the head.

"I'm sure of what I say, may'r," declared Mahomet, "and you'll see jist as I do when a conference is held."

"Well," replied the mayor, with an air of hesitation, "I'll not commit myself as to the gal, but I'll promise no harm shall come to Darral if he'll come into camp."

"Gentlemen," said Poole, leaping into his saddle, "I'll go see Darral, but I'll promise nothing."

And turning his horse's head down the gulch he and his companion galloped away.

"Well, 'Homet, what next?" asked Bloom, evidently at his wits' end.

"Fun, may'r, fun; if Old Darral'll come up here I'll make it so musical for him he'll wish he'd never been born, and don't you forget to remember and recollect it."

"I'm afraid we'll lose the gal yit if we don't run her away into the hills and conceal her. Darral has every advantage of us, and he knows it."

Thus the two conversed for some time, when they finally turned and went around to the mayor's cabin and had a talk with Numa and her father to whom they related Darral's latest expedient to get possession of the former.

From the cabin they went direct to the saloon accompanied by John Custer.

They had just reached the place, when who should come riding up to the door but Sheriff Poole and Bishop Darral.

The Saint had a sullen, angry look upon his face, and a bandage around his throat. He carried his head like one with a very stiff neck.

"Well, sheriff," exclaimed Old Mahomet, as the two men entered the saloon, "I observe that the good Bishop decided to accept my proposition and call for a chat."

"Yes," snapped the Mormon, like a worried wolf, "but I want it understood that I'm in no mood to trifle over this matter very long."

"Them's my sentiments, Bishop," replied the Puzzle; "I mean business—I'm out and around, I am."

"Well, what's wanted with me here?" gruffly demanded the Bishop, his cold, gray eyes fixed upon Mahomet.

"To see if we can't settle this matter 'bout the stolen horses without makin' any arrests."

"I can't compromise a felony," declared the Bishop, with the air of one insulted by even the suggestion of such a thing.

"They were not stolen horses, Bishop Darral," spoke up John Custer, confronting the Mormon; "they were the property of my son!"

"Your son!" sneered Darral, "a worthy son of a noble sire! You and he together tried to defraud me out of the payment of your note I had carried, out of charity for you, for years. You made over your property to your son and daughter, and then hid yourself away to make people believe you'd been foully dealt with, while your offsprings could dispose of your property and flee. But I thwarted that scheme!"

"Darral, you know where I was and who had me placed a prisoner in that loathsome cavern!" thundered the old man.

"Do you mean to say I put you somewhere a prisoner?" demanded Darral.

"No, I do not say you did it, but you had it done!"

"You lie, sir!" was the response of the enraged Mormon.

"Very well," said Custer, coolly, "time will prove what I say."

"Y s," retorted the Mormon, "it will prove a good many things—things that have been proven before, John Worth!"

"Let it all out, Darral," said Custer, "I'm ready for the worst."

"That's the gallows!"

"Then so be it," replied Custer, with an exasperating coolness.

"Men," said Darral, addressing himself to the miners, "I did not come here to quarrel, but to make a statement, by your request, of my case against the Custers. I bought from Tom Custer and Numa all their property, and when I wished to apply an old note—a legacy of their father, and one binding upon them as upon me—on the purchase, he whined like a baby—turned around and stole two of the horses I'd bought and run off with them."

"Bishop, was the note you held against Custer made payable to you?" asked Old Mahomet.

"No; I had purchased it of one Daniel Kirk."

"Ah, Darral!" exclaimed Custer, "if your life record was laid bare, I dare say, worse crimes than horse-stealing would be written of, in letters of blood!"

"John Custer Worth!" Darral fairly shrieked, incited to a new burst of rage by Custer's remarks, "no longer will I shield you, though the heavens fall upon me! I wish to inform these miners that are befriending you that you are not the father of the girl, Numa, and that there stands to-day on the court-records of Kentucky an indictment against you for the murder of Daniel Kirk!"

"And I want to inform them that there stands on the records of High Heaven, an indictment against you, Bishop Darral, for the willful and deliberate murder of Ishmael Barr, and his entire family!"

It was a strange yet earnest voice that made this scathing accusation, and turning toward the open door the Bishop found himself confronted by the mysterious Indian, Thunder Voice!

CHAPTER XX.

THE MORMON "PILLAR" TOTTERING.

BISHOP DARRAL grew visibly pale, and a shiver ran through his form as his eyes met those of the tall Indian. Involuntarily he shrunk back as if the burning gaze of the red-skin's eyes penetrated to his very soul. The momentary silence that followed was broken by a subdued voice in the room, saying:

"Lafayette! Lafayette! the gallows awaits you in two lands!"

Turning like a wild beast at bay, Darral sought to discover the speaker among the many faces turned toward him.

"Another State heard from!" exclaimed Mahomet, looking around, also, for the speaker; "the blows are falling thick and heavy on you, Bishop."

"It's a conspiracy! a conspiracy!" cried the Mormon excitedly.

"Let's hear, anyhow, what that Injun's got to say."

"Curse the Injin!"

"Hear the Injin! hear the Injin!" yelled a dozen deafening voices.

"Sheriff, you should arrest every man here!" exclaimed Darral, mad with rage, "and kick that Injin out of sight!"

"Order! order!" commanded the sheriff; "men, we took you at your word and came here to avert trouble not to make it."

"Order, men!" shouted Old Mahomet; "order, and hear what the Injin has to say."

"Curse the Injin, I repeat!" hissed Darral.

"Save your curses, Bishop," said Thunder Voice, "for like your touch, they will no longer blight and wither; your crimes in the name of the Mormon Church are about ended. I have waited and prayed for this hour to be able to reproach you for the murder of Ishmael Barr and family over ten years."

"Miners of Pilgrims' Bar, you can't intimidate me by these trumped-up charges of creatures like this savage!" Darral proclaimed, with a sickly attempt to appear defiant and resolute.

"Hold on, Darral," Thunder Voice said, laying his hand upon the Bishop's shoulder, "this is no trumped-up charge. You know it, too, and that's what hurts. You cannot have forgotten that one night years ago, you and six other Mormons, visited the humble home of Ishmael Barr to rob him of his fair daughter Grace, who had steadfastly refused to become your wife. You must remember what took place—that the family barred the house and fought for their lives and honor. But, you overpowered the father and mother and the children, and when you found Grace had taken her life rather than be disgraced, you murdered the entire fa-

mily—you and your minions, inspired by the example of John D. Lee and his minions at Mountain Meadow, butchered Ishmael Barr and his family. No, not all, either; you remember a boy of ten years that you struck down, and then cut his throat—killing him as you supposed. But the blade did not cut deeper than did Silent Saul's into your throat last night. He recovered his senses—that boy did—and crept away to the camp of some vagabond Indians, who dressed his wounds and cared for him. He recovered, but his tongue was paralyzed. He became Silent Saul, the Mountain Patrol—an avenger. He made his home among the Indians who befriended him. He became a leader among them. They honored and respected him because of his misfortune. For years Silent Saul has roamed through the hills, camps, and settlements—doing good where he could for the worthy, but all the while seeking the murderers of his family. Every one of them has fallen a victim to his vengeance but yourself. You could have been slain years ago, but Saul preferred to let you live in hopes his speech might be restored to him, that in words spoken he could reproach you for your crime before slaying you. Last night Silent Saul spoke the first word in ten years. His speech was suddenly restored to him in answer to a prayer to Almighty God. That boy of ten whom you struck down—whom you deprived of home and family stands before you! *I am Robert Barr—Silent Saul!*"

Bishop Darral reeled back, throwing up his arm as if to ward off a blow, horror depicted upon every line of his wicked face. But Silent Saul, for this mysterious youth Thunder Voice really was, did not offer to strike him. He was content for the time being to see the guilty wretch tremble and writhe in an agony of fear.

The miners were astounded by the story Silent Saul told, but of its truthfulness there were no doubts, for after he had declared himself, all could readily see he was the Mountain Patrol.

"That's layin' it in pretty thick," declared Mayor Bloom.

"Yes, and while the shower's on, and I'm out and around," said Old Mahomet, "I want to drop a word or two for the ear of the Bishop, and, also, Poker Jack, here, who turns out to be the festive rogue-catcher, Detective Jack Strickland, with a warrant for Custer—John Custer Worth's arrest for the murder of Dan Kirk. I want to inform them that J. Custer Worth is not guilty of any murder, but has been a victim of a rascally conspiracy to rob him, in which Daniel Kirk suffered likewise. I know all about that murder business—"

"It's false—false as the devil!" cried Darral, recovered from his "paralysis of terror," "you know nothing except what Custer has been stuffing you with in order to get himself sworn out of a bad scrape."

"Listen, will you?" said Mahomet, "and I'll convince you I do know something 'bout that affair. You and Dan Kirk and John C. Worth were neighbors in Kentucky. You disliked Worth because of his defeating you for a political office. You and Kirk were friends. The war broke out. Kirk was a Union man and so you pretended to be. For fear of being forced into the rebel army, Kirk whose wife had recently died, sold his property to Worth, took his note payable in two years, and away he went North, having left the note in your hands to be collected if he never returned, and placed on interest for the benefit of his child, then a young babe."

"Kirk entered the Federal navy and served three years, was wounded in one eye, but finally got through safe and returned to Kentonville under an assumed name. Judge of his surprise to find Worth and all his family gone, also his friend Darral, and nearly every other family he had known. The war had swept the country clean, but from an old, aged man who had not been molested, Kirk learned that John C. Worth had murdered him—that is, Kirk—and that he was indicted on Darral's testimony and would no doubt have hung but for the coming of Morgan's Cavalry. What become of Worth he never knew, nor did he know what had become of Darral—you, Bishop. He did remember, however, that what was left of Worth's estate, was taken and sold to satisfy a note you held against Worth, drawn in favor of Kirk. So it seems you have managed to present that note the second time for payment."

"You are a lying impostor!" hissed Darral.

"O, no, I'm not, Bishop," replied Mahomet, with his bland smile; "for some reason or other, you were not compelled to surrender the note when first paid, but stuck to it till you were enabled to find John Custer Worth, when

again you opened upon him. You no doubt thought Kirk had been killed—in fact, such a report did reach Kentonville; but when he found all his friends gone, he did not make himself known and began rambling around over the country making a kind of an old fool of himself. One day he ran slam-bang against his old friend, Darral, in this country, but his old friend didn't recognize him. To be sure, nearly seventeen years had changed Kirk a great deal, besides the squint in his wounded eye made him look like another man. Bishop, do you catch on? Do you recognize in me, Old Mahomet, your old friend and neighbor, Daniel Kirk? I am Dan'l, Bishop, alive as you see, perfectly healthy, and sound 'cept this eye, and I'm out and around, I am. And this knocks the stuffin' outen your murder case, and I want five thousand dollars outen you with interest for seventeen years. But, Darral, your persecution of Worth is not what has made me your enemy, but your brutal treatment and persecution of—of his daughter, Numa!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A DEATH STRUGGLE.

OLD MAHOMET'S revelations, like a sudden burst of light dispelling gloom, laid bare the true character and wickedness of Bishop Darral.

The villain admitted by his looks that, in Mahomet, he recognized Daniel Kirk, and with apparent despondency of heart, he finally turned to Poole and observed:

"Sheriff, I'm going; it's no use to waste breath with this mob of jackals."

Silent Saul quickly sprung between him and the door.

"No, no, Saul," said Mayor Bloom; "let him depart. We promised the sheriff no harm should befall him if he would come here and endeavor to settle our troubles. He came, and while no compromise has been made, we must keep our word with Sheriff Poole."

With a bow of submission Silent Saul stepped aside and the Mormon passed out of the saloon. He did not wait for the sheriff, who tarried behind, but mounting his horse, he rode away as though the furies were after him.

Sheriff Poole being now introduced to the noted detective, Jack Strickland, sat down to chat with him, having sworn to have nothing further to do with Darral and his warrants.

Not over forty minutes had passed, when to the surprise and consternation of all, Darral was seen returning; but he was not alone. At his horse's heels marched a column of armed men, to the number of nearly three-score.

"The tug's comin' now, boys!" said Old Mahomet.

"Let it come," said Thunder Voice, "I am ready for it."

At the lower end of camp Darral halted his force and formed them in line so as to present as formidable array as possible. Then a man was sent forward, evidently to confer with the authorities.

Bloom and Thunder Voice advanced to meet him. He came with the demand for the immediate surrender of Numa Custer and Silent Saul.

"Go back and tell your friends to scamper to purgatory," said Thunder Voice, "or else come and take us if they can."

The man departed with the message.

In the meantime, Old Mahomet was marshaling all the available forces in camp ready for battle. The odds were three to one against them, but they felt no fear. They were ready to die, if need be, in defense of their protégée.

Knowing the superior numbers of his force, it was evident that Darral had hoped to gain a bloodless victory by making an imposing display. But he had reckoned without his host, as he found out to his surprise when his dispatch-bearer returned.

An advance on the camp was at once ordered, but the line had not gone over twenty rods when it was again halted. Again a demand for the surrender of Saul and Numa was made, and as before, it was refused with haughty disdain. Intimidation by array of warriors had entirely failed, and it became plain that they must now fight or back down entirely in the very sight of the waiting, defiant miners.

Darral and Revenue Bill stood and talked together some minutes. The sun was nearly down, and when the bandit chief was seen to glance toward the west, Thunder Voice at once mistrusted what it meant—that he was noting the position of the sun, with the view of deferring the attack until night set in.

"Mayor," said the young mountaineer, "it's fight now or never. I'm going to force the bat-

tle," and as he concluded, he placed a whistle to his lips and blew three sharp, shrill blasts that fairly awoke the mountain echoes.

Instantly it was answered from the bluffs overlooking the camp, and then, like so many spirits bursting from the shadows, three-score Indians sprung from the hillside and came swarming down into the gulch, their weapons glinting and flashing in the red rays of the setting sun, while the very air seemed to shake and quiver with their unearthly and demoniac yells.

Revenue Bill and Darral stood for a moment as if dazed by sight of the human avalanche pouring down into the valley, but they soon realized the situation, and quickly gave a command that swung their line of warriors around so as to confront the unexpected foe.

The first shot was fired by Revenue Bill at Thunder Voice, who, shouting to his friends, rushed to the conflict with tomahawk in hand. Instantly a volley from rifles and revolvers rattled and crashed through the gulch, and bullets whistled and shrieked through the air.

The followers of Thunder Voice hurled themselves upon the allied forces of outlaw and Mormon, and then the dull crash of blows, the flash of murderous knives and the cries of agony and curses and yells of rage told how terrible and deadly was the struggle.

Down from the saloon, at the head of the miners came brave Old Mahomet, firm and undaunted as the veteran that he was, and joined in the conflict, he and his friends striking the foe on the right flank.

More than a hundred men and savages had now become mixed in the hand-to-hand struggle. To and fro, around and around, with yells, groans and curses, sodden blows and pistol-shots blending in one frightful din, surged and swayed the seething, writhing mass like battling fiends in a swirling vortex of hell!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE "PROTÉGÉE" A CAPTIVE AT LAST.

AS soon as Bishop Darral left the City Hall John Custer started on his return to his daughter at Bloom's cabin, accompanied by Detective Strickland. As they slowly walked along the latter said:

"Well, really, Mr. Custer, Pilgrim's Bar is a little the liveliest placer-camp I ever struck. For meanness, that man Darral seems the grand sachem of all. In his schemes against you—his enemy—he used his best friend, Kirk, almost as mean."

"Meaner, Jack, meaner, knowing what he did," declared Custer; "you know it has already been said the girl Numa is not my daughter?"

"Yes, I heard so," answered the detective.

"It is true, she's not my child, though as dear to me as if she were my own flesh and blood. Her mother died when she was but one week old. My good wife, now in heaven, took the little babe, and we raised her as our own. She does not know but that she's my child; but, Strickland, Old Mahomet—Daniel Kirk—is her father!"

Strickland stopped and gazing into the old man's face uttered a low whistle of surprise.

"Thicker and thicker!" he finally declared; "will surprises never end?"

Here the conversation ended, for they had reached the cabin. Numa met them at the door with smiles and kind words of greeting; and ushering them into the cabin.

Before seating himself the detective removed his revolvers from his pockets and laid them on a shelf within reach.

Scarcely had he become settled in his seat when the ears of all were assailed by that terrible din of battle.

A cry of terror burst from Numa's lips. John Custer started, his tall form erect, his eyes flashing with the fire of youth; then with a bound he reached the door, and seizing Strickland's revolvers as he went, he exclaimed:

"They are at it, and I'm needed. I'm going to take a hand in that fight. May God protect you, Numa," and before Numa could enter her protest to his going, he was speeding away as if the sound of battle had thrilled him with the vigor of youth.

Poker Jack arose and leaning against the door-jamb listened to the dreadful sound for a few moments. Then his spirit began to chafe within him, and although scarcely able to stand, he told Numa he felt it his duty to give all the aid he could to her friends, and would at once go to their assistance.

Numa begged him not to go, for she would be left alone.

Just then three men were observed coming

on a run toward the cabin. Strickland recognized them as three of the strangers that had come to camp that day with Old Spider. He knew not whether they were friends or foes, but they were cowards, at least, he thought, else they would have joined the miners in the battle.

Straight toward the door of the cabin they came, each with a revolver in his hand. Strickland saw now that they meant mischief and stepped back into the room. Custer had taken his pistols, but grasping a pick-handle that stood in the corner of the cabin he took his position to defend the girl.

"Halt, there!" he called out as the men approached.

A shot from the foremost villain answered him, the bullet "fanning" his cheek.

Then into the room bounded the wretch, when "crash" fell the pick-handle on his head and he dropped as if smitten by lightning.

The other two villains bounded into the room together and then came a double blow and two more forms were felled to the floor insensible; but one of these was the form of brave Jack Strickland. One of the outlaws had struck him on the head with his revolver.

Numa, crouching in terror, in the corner, now found herself alone, as it were, with a man whom she recognized as the friend and tool of Bishop Darral.

"Ho, my pretty bird!" he exclaimed, "we've got you at last! Come, not a word nor a whimper!"

He seized her by the arm and dragged her over the prostrate form of his friends and the detective to the door. There she fell fainting.

The Mormon, for such he was, lifted her in his arms as though she were a child and bore her away up the gulch. As soon as he was out of sight of the cabins, he began climbing the hillside on the left. He followed a path that led up and back into the dark recesses of the mountains.

Numa showed signs of returning consciousness in the course of a few minutes, and her abductor strained every nerve to get as far away as possible before this happened.

Finally he succeeded in reaching a narrow bench of plateau, on the mountain-side, almost out of breath. Then he stopped to rest, laying his burden on the ground and seating himself by her side.

He had scarcely done so when the figure of a man with haggard face, blood-shot eyes and torn garments leaped from behind a rock and ran toward him with an uplifted club in his hand. The Mormon heard the approaching footsteps and sprang to his feet, drawing a pistol. But he was not quick enough, for the haggard man, whose club fell with a crash upon his skull, striking him to the earth at the feet of the maiden, to all appearances dead.

"Numa!" then burst from the lips of the man as he bent over the figure of the girl, "Numa, sister, awake!"

The words, like an electric thrill, caused the maiden to start, open her eyes, and glare wildly up into the face bending over her.

"Numa, don't you know me?" the man asked.

"It's Tom! Oh, it's brother Tom!" burst from her lips.

And so it was.

"Yes, sister," he answered, "I have been lost in the mountains since the day we parted. Like a fool, I have cursed my fate a dozen times, at last to find it was God's will that it be so that you might be saved! But, Numa, what meant those dreadful sounds of battle I heard a few moments ago off yonder? Can you tell me? How have you fared since we parted?"

Numa told him all, and the young man fairly wept with joy when he heard that his father was living.

The sound of battle had now ceased, and as the sun was just going down, Tom and Numa started in the direction of the camp. They had not gone far when they discovered two Indians coming toward them like hounds upon a trail.

Tom became alarmed, but Numa, recognizing one of the red-skins as Thunder Voice, dispelled his fears, and soon they were with the Indians.

Numa's first words were to inquire about the result of the battle and her father's safety, to which Silent Saul replied:

"We fairly obliterated Revenue Bill and Bishop Darral's forces, killing both the leaders. But it cost us dearly. Half my Indian friends were killed or wounded. Among the latter were Old Mahomet and your father, though neither, I hope, are dangerous."

A cry of anguish burst from Numa's lips, and she begged to be taken at once to her father's assistance.

On the way to camp Saul related how, after the battle, he had gone to the cabin and found Jack Strickland just recovering from a blow on the head, and the maiden gone. From the detective he learned what had happened, and, taking an Indian trailer, he had followed to her rescue.

It was dark when the camp was reached. Numa and Tom were taken to a cabin wherein lay their father and Mahomet in great misery. But at sight of his children John Custer seemed to forget his suffering, and fairly shouted with joy; and after Numa had sobbed out a prayer of joy and thanks for their deliverance from persecution, he said:

"Now I can die in peace!"

"Die?" cried Tom; "you do not mean that you are so seriously hurt as to think of dying."

"Tom, my brave boy," the old man said, "I'm going—going fast!"

A wail burst from Numa's lips, and Tom sunk on his knees at his father's side in despair.

Old Mahomet, who was lying on the opposite side of the room, turned his face to the wall and wept like a child. He, too, was dying. He knew the fair and lovely Numa was his own child! He longed to speak to her as her father, to tell her of her mother, and receive one word—one caress—such as she had bestowed upon her foster-father before he passed away. But, he could not think of breaking that holy bond that bound together the hearts of the Custer family, nor claim any of that affection that John Custer, through fatherly love and kindness, had cultivated in the girl's breast.

To relieve his mind of its distress, he sent for Silent Saul. When the Young Patrol came in, he said:

"Saul, before I go, I want to ask you one question: Have you ever mistrusted what the mystery of the Devil's Stew-Kettle could be?"

"Yes," replied the young man, with a smile; "I think Old Mahomet, the Puzzle, is the Genius that saved me from a watery grave the other night."

"You are right," said the wounded man. "The miners have for months been wondering where I got so much dust, seein' I worked but little, but I was out and around all the same. When I first saw the Devil's Stew-Kettle, an idea struck me. For thirteen years I have been a miner, and had some 'sperience in 'placers,' and it occurred to me the whirlpool might be a depository of wealth like no less than two pot-holes I knew of in Wyoming streams. I knew that while the smaller particles of gold floating down had long ago found a resting-place in the placers of the valley below, there was the spot at which weightier pieces must have sunk, ground up together until the rock was all loosened and carried away, and then the gold settled to rest forever, unless disturbed by the hand of man. I sounded the pot-hole, and found it quite deep, which was all the better, and, strippin' off my clothes, I took a big rock in my hands and jumped into the water. Down and down I sunk till my feet touched the bottom, then I let go the stone, grabbed two handfuls of loose stuff on the bottom and rose to the surface and scrambled ashore. To my joy I found in the two handfuls I brought up, nuggets of gold varying from ten to twenty dollars in value. I knew then I had found a bonanza, and in the same way I have been workin' my claim ever since, mostly at night."

"In the course of time I found a sort of cave under the rock over which the water shoots into the pot-hole. From that point I generally made my descents, and by means of a guide-rope returned there. I was concealed there the night the Mormons and outlaws threw you into the hole, and by the time you was at the bottom, I was there also, knife in hand to cut your bonds. I dragged you up under the rock, and you were saved. That, Saul, is all there is of the mystery of the whirlpool. I know there are thousands worth of treasure there yet; but it'll do me no good now; but, Saul, it will do others good, and I now desire to bequeath you, and—Come closer, Saul."

Saul stooped and placed his ear near the old man's mouth when he said in a whisper:

"To you and Numa Custer, all my right and title in that whirlpool."

Here the old man paused for a moment, and was about to resume, when he was startled by a cry from Numa's lips. He looked around and saw the maiden standing, clutching her brow,

her face white as a sheet and her streaming eyes fixed as if by sudden terror.

There was a momentary silence, then as if her heart-strings had been snapped asunder, the girl cried out:

"You not my father!"

"Ah, John!" exclaimed Old Mahomet, "why did you not let that secret go with us? Why sever the bond that binds your hearts as father and child?"

"Daniel," replied Custer in a feeble voice, "I could not die happy without telling her. Nor have I told her all yet—that you, Daniel, are her real father!"

"What?" cried Numa, "Mahomet my father? and he dying too? Oh, my God! my God!"

The shock was more than the poor girl's overwrought brain could withstand, and she sunk in a swoon to the floor.

It was long hours before she recovered, and when she did, the first thing she noticed was a form lying on the bunk where she had last seen her father, covered with a blanket, silent and motionless. It required no words to tell her the terrible truth; the man she had known as her father was dead!

Old Mahomet was still alive but rapidly sinking. Numa went to his bedside and as she gazed down into his rough, bearded face, he put out his hand toward her. She grasped it in her own, and kissed it; then, with the word "father" upon her lips, she sunk sobbing on her knees at his bedside.

Tenderly the old man talked to her, and told her of her birth, the death of her mother, and of the cruel fate that had kept them apart. She listened, like one in a dream, to his story, and when he had concluded, her tears were dried; the fountain of her grief had been exhausted, and her heart and mind had become resigned to their double burden of surprise and sorrow.

During the remaining hours of his life Mahomet's wants were attended to by his daughter. She never left his bedside for a moment until his spirit had passed from its broken tenement into that unknown land beyond the Silent River which flows into the Sea Eternal.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CONCLUSION.

WITH the death of Revenue Bill and Bishop Darral, Pilgrims' Bar's troubles ceased, although the few miners left would have gone away, through fear of an uprising of the Mormons, had they been able to remove their wounded with safety.

But, no Saints appeared to avenge the death of Darral. In fact, it was afterward learned that, while the so-called "Bishop" was a leader among them, he was a tyrant, feared and hated, whose taking off was regarded with no little silent satisfaction. It was, also, learned that he and some of his immediate friends, who died with him, were in league with Revenue Bill, and that they shared in the "assessments" of the daring Bandit Collector.

Silent Saul sent his red-skin friends back to their mountain homes with many a blessing from those whom they had so opportunely aided in saving from a life of suffering, the Protégée of Pilgrims' Bar.

The Young Patrol set earnestly to work to secure the treasure Old Mahomet had predicted was lying in the bottom of the whirlpool. By diverting the course of the river, the pot-hole was pumped dry and fully three thousand ounces of treasure was obtained, which he shared equally with Numa, as per request of her father. But this gold was not all the riches the gallant youth secured. In the heart and hand of Numa herself, he secured a treasure more priceless than all the metals of earth, and they, as man and wife, are to-day living in the full enjoyment of a happy and prosperous life in one of the large cities of the West.

After Silent Saul, whose real name, for obvious reasons, we have kept concealed all along, quit the mountains and settled down with his charming wife, he entered upon a life-work which, at no distant date, he hopes to see carried to a successful issue; that work is the overthrow of the Mormon Church, which has been the cause of untold misery and crimes, as well as a burning disgrace to the American Republic.

Jack Strickland remained at the Bar until he had fully recovered from his wounds. Of this noted mountain detective we have seen but little, but in the near future we hope to be able to present him in a light where all his wonderful power and skill as a man-hunter will be fully revealed.

THE END.

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- 624 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Nevada.
- 630 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in No Man's Land.
- 636 Deadwood Dick, Jr., After the Queer.
- 642 Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Buffalo.
- 648 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Chase Across the Continent.
- 654 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Among the Smugglers.
- 660 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Insurance Case.
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- 690 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Dollars.
- 695 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Danger Divide.
- 700 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Drop.
- 704 Deadwood Dick, Jr., at Jack-Pot.
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- 716 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Still Hunt.
- 722 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Dominoes.
- 728 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Disguise.
- 734 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Double Deal.
- 740 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Deathwatch.
- 747 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Doublet.
- 752 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Deathblow.
- 758 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Desperate Strait.
- 764 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Lone Hand.
- 770 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Defeat.
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- 782 Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s Dark Days.
- 787 Deadwood Dick, Jr., Defied.
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- 291 Turk, the Boy Ferret.
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- 524 The Engineer Detective; or, Redlight Ralph's Resolve.
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- 571 Air-Line Luke, the Young Engineer; or, The Dog's Case.
- 592 The Boy Pinkerton; or, Renning the Rascals.
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- 586 Kent Kingdon's Doom; or, The Buckskin Avenger.
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- 550 Laffie's Legacy; or, The Avenging Son.
- 555 Laffie's Confession; or, The Creole C. rail.
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- 525 The Buckskin Brothers in Texas.
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- 507 The Royal Middy's Luck; or, The Hunted Midshipman.
- 511 The Royal Middy's Foe.
- 450 Wizard Will; or, The Boy Ferret of New York.
- 454 Wizard Will's Street Scouts.
- 474 Wizard Will's Pard; or, Flora, the Flower Girl.
- 483 Wizard Will's Last Case; or, The Ferrets Afloat.
- 429 Duncan Dare, the Boy Refugee.
- 433 Duncan Dare's Plot; or, A Cabin Boy's Luck.
- 437 Duncan Dare's Prize; or, The Sea Raider.
- 441 Duncan Dare's Secret; or, The Ocean Firefly.
- 402 Isador, the Young Conspirator; or, The Fatal League.
- 407 Isador's Double Chaser; or, The Boy Insurgent.
- 412 Isador's War-Cloud Cruise; or, The Wild Yachtsman.
- 216 Bison Bill, the Prince of the Plains.
- 222 Bison Bill's Clue; or, Grit, the Bravo Sport.
- 304 Dead Shot Dandy's Dilemma.
- 308 Dead Shot Dandy's Double; or, Keno Kit.
- 314 Dead Shot Dandy's Defiance; or, The Boy Bugler.
- 607 Dead Shot Dandy's Chief; or, The River Detective.
- 245 Merle Monte's Leap for Life.
- 250 Merle Monte's Mutiny; or, Brandt, the Buccaneer.
- 264 Merle Monte's Treasure Island.
- 269 Merle Monte the Condemned.
- 276 Merle Monte's Cruise; or, "The Gold Ship" Chase.
- 280 Merle Monte's Fate; or, The Pirate's Pride.
- 284 Merle Monte's Pledge; or, The Sea Marauder.
- 197 The Kid Glove Sport; or, Little Grit, the Wild Rider.
- 204 The Kid Glove Sport's Doom; or, Buffalo Bill, the Pony Express Rider.
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- 387 Warpath Will, the Tractor Guide.
- 383 The Indian Pilot; or, The Search for Pirate Island.
- 327 Bonodel, the Boy Rover; or, The Flagless Schooner.
- 237 Billy Blue-Eyes, of the Rio Grande.
- 237 Lone Star, the Cowboy Captain.
- 229 Crimson Kate, the Girl Triller; or, The Cowboy's Triumph.
- 116 The Hussar Captain; or, The Hermit of Hell Gate.
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